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She is Rhodesia

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She is Rhodesia

by Anmarie McDonald



Characters:

Frankie, white woman, early 40s

Sally Mugabe, first wife of Robert Mugabe, she died in 1996,
black woman early 40s

Thandi, black woman, early 40s

Georgie, white woman, mid 40s, Frankie's older sister

Tip, white man, 60s, father to Frankie and Georgie

Elle, white girl, 16, Georgie's daughter

Barbara, white woman, mid 40s

PROLOGUE

(Downstage SALLY MUGABE and FRANKIE sit side by side in what appear to be airplane seats. SALLY wears a bright java print dress and head scarf and carries a 50s-style structured handbag. FRANKIE is wearing ordinary Western clothing. She has donned an eye mask and is covered by an airline blanket. Asleep, FRANKIE snuggles against SALLY as she speaks.)

It is mid-afternoon on Friday.

Upstage TIP sits on a sofa that dominates a chaotic looking but comfortable sitting room. The room has an exit that leads to the front door, a door that leads to a kitchen that can be seen in part, French doors that open to a garden that can be partially seen and an exit that leads upstairs.

Along with TIP, one African print cushion sits comfortably on the sofa.

*As SALLY begins to speak TIP tunes the guitar and once happy with its sound, begins to softly play **Nkosi Sikelel i'Africa** [God Bless Africa].)*

SALLY London. West five.
 Where her father lives. That's where we're going.
 20 Madeley Road.
 He's a lovely man, her father.

 I lived there. Once. In exile.
 Can you believe it?
 The wife of the future president - in Ealing!

 Back then I was the good wife.
 The right wife.
 The only wife.

 Robert was in prison for freedom fighting, just like Mandela.
 For a moment he was just like Mandela.

 If I had stayed in Rhodesia I would have been in prison too.

 When I returned, Rhodesia wanted to be Zimbabwe.
 He became President,
 and I the First Lady.
 He demanded that the press, that everyone, call me
 Amai.
 It means mother in Shona.

I had no children but,
he made me Mother of Zimbabwe.
Everyone's mother.
Even his.

And if I was his mother, than it was easy for *her* to become his wife.

Robert fought to have me laid to rest in the ground with the war veterans.
How loudly he buried me when I was dead,
not just to him but to everyone.

I was not a war hero.
I was not Zimbabwean.
(*pleadingly*) I am from Ghana.

But Francesca. She keeps me alive. A little.

TIP (*singing*) Woza Moya

SALLY (*answers, singing*) Woza, woza –

TIP (*singing*) Woza Moya

SALLY (*answers, singing*) Woza, woza,

TIP (*singing*) Woza Moya, Oyingcwele.
Usisikelele,

TIP and SALLY (*singing*) Thina lusapho lwayo.

SALLY (*crosses herself and speaks*) God Bless Africa.

TIP (*singing*) Nkosi Sikelel i'Africa. (*He continues humming the tune and playing.*)

(*Lights fade on SALLY and FRANKIE.*)

VOICE off stage (*airport loudspeaker*) Will Doctor Thandi Ntebewe please meet her party
at carousel 6. Doctor Ntebewe, please meet your party at carousel 6.

(*Lights up on the sitting room where TIP is still strumming the tune. GEORGIE enters with a
bottle of red wine that she places on a table. She is wearing a red t-shirt printed with a graphic
for the Zimbabwe Vigil and the same bird that appears on the Zimbabwe national flag.*)

Scene 1, FRIDAY LATE AFTERNOON

GEORGIE Why now when she's never before?

TIP Not never.
(He continues to lightly strum the guitar.)

GEORGIE Nearly.

She wouldn't know where to find the toilet here.

TIP You'll you show her?

GEORGIE I don't blame her.

You wouldn't know where to find the toilet in her house.

TIP Her house was once my house.

GEORGIE Oh right.

It's just. Funny. Her. Here.

TIP It's the cushions. Be supportive Georgie.

GEORGIE Do you think they've seen them?
(GEORGIE goes to the kitchen and returns with 4 wine glasses.)

TIP Oh yeah! Her cushions are right up their street. I bought this from them.

GEORGIE The sofa?

TIP The cover. On-line. Urban Bazaar dot com. Twenty-four hour a day shopping, free shipping, no hassle returns. I had it in two days.

GEORGIE Dad? I thought this was from Zimbabwe?

TIP It is.

GEORGIE I mean I thought you. Brought it.

TIP I haven't been in Zimbabwe for 40 years.

GEORGIE I think she must need a break.

TIP From the pressures of cushion creation? Be supportive.

GEORGIE From Zimbabwe. I am supportive.

TIP Her email said it's fine. They've got imports again.

GEORGIE Overpriced shortbread and Marmite don't make it okay.

TIP It used to.
(TIP puts the guitar aside.)

GEORGIE Is Thandi parking or circling?

TIP They've agreed where to meet.

GEORGIE Frankie hasn't been to Heathrow in years.

TIP She's got her phone.

GEORGIE It may not work here.

TIP She'll work it out.

GEORGIE What if Thandi's just circling?

TIP She'll go in.

GEORGIE Why did you leave her to collect Frankie?

TIP She offered.

They've been friends since school.

GEORGIE I know. Shame.

TIP Is that supportive?

GEORGIE I mean she's always late.

TIP *(looks at his watch)* Not yet.

(ELLE enters carrying a sewing machine.)

ELLE Oh my God. You will not believe it.

GEORGIE She's here?

ELLE This is heavy Mum. (*"get out of the way"*)

(*ELLE places the sewing machine on a table upstage.*)

We killed a parrot. Nearly.

Hi Granddad.

(*She gives him a peck on the cheek.*)

TIP In the park?
(*TIP begins to fiddle with the sewing machine.*)

ELLE In the car! Clare drove me over. She got her learners permit last week and she is so rubbish.

GEORGIE Clare has a parrot?

ELLE They'll be here in 20 minutes Mum.

GEORGIE How do you know?

ELLE I didn't know. At first. I mean, a parrot? So like this thing came slamming into the windscreen and it wasn't that bad but it made a huge thwack. And Clare was trying to use the indicator because she wanted to turn in but she hit the wipers instead, she's a rubbish driver and the wipers swept the bird right off the glass and then it flew away. And you could see. It was a parrot. What if it's hurt?

GEORGIE I'm sure it was a magpie or a pigeon. It's not your fault.

TIP It's Jimi Hendrix's fault.

ELLE I know the difference between a pigeon and a parrot.
(*to Georgie*)

GEORGIE What?
(*to Tip*)

TIP The parrots in Ealing belong to Jimi Hendrix.

GEORGIE The parrots. In Ealing. Belong to Jimi Hendrix?
That's got to be old wives tale.

ELLE Whose old wife?
(to Georgie)

TIP He lived in London, Carnaby Street. He came in '68 – the same year I did.

(referring to sewing machine) Frankie said she wanted a basic machine. Is this too basic?

ELLE Clare's mom said Frankie can use it until Tuesday but then she needs it back. And she says the zigzag stitch sticks.

TIP Only to Tuesday?

ELLE What do parrots have to do with Jimi Hendrix?

TIP He kept parrots. I saw them when we played together. But he let them go when he left London. That's what they say. The birds survived the winter, bred like rabbits and now there are hundreds of wild parrots all over west London. Haven't you ever seen them in Walpole Park?

ELLE You never said you played with Jimi Hendrix?

TIP You never killed a parrot.

ELLE I didn't kill it. It flew away. I saw it fly away.

TIP It's okay.

The guy at the cafe says they escaped when the African Queen was being filmed at Ealing Studios. But that's a bit far-fetched.

GEORGIE You think?

ELLE Please Mum. Where's your bag. You have got to change.

TIP Hendrix had parrots. I saw them.

GEORGIE Change what?

TIP And the African Queen was filmed at Shepperton.

ELLE Your shirt. You're not wearing that shirt when Aunt Frankie's here?

GEORGIE Why not?

ELLE Of course 'why not?'

GEORGIE What's wrong with this shirt?

ELLE Mum. What if I walked around in a t-shirt that said "Chiswick sucks?" Wouldn't that get on your nerves?

GEORGIE This doesn't say Chiswick sucks. Chiswick doesn't. Suck. Does it?

TIP Hmm. The guy at the cafe says Ealing is as good as Chiswick. But without the wankers.

GEORGIE Nobody knows better than Frankie that Zimbabwe. Sucks.

Do you really think Chiswick sucks?

ELLE It can and anyway, you look hideous in red.

GEORGIE I want to tell Frankie about the Vigil.

ELLE Fine.

(Elle digs through her rather enormous bag and finds a top that she hands to her mother.)

But put this on.

GEORGIE This?

ELLE Mum!

*(GEORGIE exits upstairs to change her shirt. TIP begins singing and playing on the guitar **Night Bird Flying** by Jimi Hendrix.)*

ELLE Is that Jimi Hendrix?

(TIP nods in the affirmative.)

Did you always want to be a musician?

TIP I just always was.

ELLE Thandi says she always knew she'd be a doctor. She says cleaning up people's messes runs in her family and she wanted to get paid for it.

TIP I think she was messing with you.

ELLE Probably. But still.

And Aunt Frankie has always been a designer.

TIP A designer?

ELLE Mom said Frankie made herself dresses and even like coats when she was only 15.

TIP Frankie's like her mother.

ELLE That's what mom says.

(ELLE listens to him playing for a moment.)

What if I killed that bird?

TIP You said you didn't. And you weren't driving.

ELLE But something was killed. Nearly.

TIP Nothing was killed. Ever. The bird's fine.

ELLE Is it going to be alright?

TIP Of course it is.

Speak to Thandi. Yeah?

(GEORGIE enters wearing her daughter's shirt.)

GEORGIE Are they here? I thought I heard a car.

(GEORGIE stands with her back to TIP, he puts the guitar aside and buttons the back of the top that she has been unable to reach.)

They really should be here by now.

ELLE Relax.

They're on CP time.

GEORGIE What?

ELLE Coloured people ti-/

GEORGIE I know. Who told-/

ELLE Thandi? ("who else?")

(a knock at the door)

GEORGIE They're here! Get it. Go on.

(ELLE exits the sitting room to answer the knock at the door.)

ELLE *(offstage)* Hi.

BARBARA *(off stage)* Hi, I'm here for Francesca Heard.

ELLE *(off stage)* Um -

(BARBARA enters having impatiently slipped past ELLE. ELLE follows behind.)

BARBARA I'm Barbara Conner Brown. Are you Francesca's people?

GEORGIE No.

TIP Yes. We're her people. I'm Tip Starling and this is Georgina and Elliot.
(TIP shakes BARBARA's hand and ushers her into the room. She is holding a large folder.)

BARBARA Pleasure. This was supposed to be biked over here hours ago but my PA is on maternity leave. So it didn't happen. Nothing is happening since she got knocked up.

(BARBARA hands TIP a folder and he opens it to look inside.)

TIP You're with Urban Bazaar. Frankie should be here any minute.

GEORGIE You want Frankie's cushions?

BARBARA God I hope I want them.

I'm the marketing consultant on the UB account. And I'm not here until Monday when I meet Francesca – but UB's a start up and they're a little tight fisted with the after-hours deliveries, dinners, drinks, travel. So I am here.

TIP Come in. Francesca's on her way.

ELLE *(mouthing the word)* Francesca?

BARBARA No. I can't stay. But please make sure she gets this.

TIP This is – *(He hands the folder to ELLE.)*

BARBARA Early shot gun mood boarding. Please ask her to review it. I'll be honest this whole Zimbabwe thing is an entirely new barrel of monkeys for us. But please reassure her. By Monday we'll have nailed her story. UB is desperate to get Zimbabwe repped on their site. The country's precarious position makes them the perfect socially conscious purchasing target for TINKIES and GLAMS.

ELLE What are twinkies and glands?

BARBARA Two-incomers, nanny and kids and the affluent greying leisure set.

TIP Is that what they're calling us these days.

BARBARA TINKIES are trouble because they're all over the socio-educational spectrum these days. Unpredictable and a little up their own, if you know what I mean.

But GLAMS. GLAMS we like. We really like.

(TIP pours two glasses of red wine.)

TIP Can I get you a drink?

BARBARA I could murder a glass of wine. But I should go.

TIP You know. I'm from Zimbabwe.

GEORGIE He hasn't been there in 40 years.

TIP *(hand to his heart)* Like it was yesterday.

(TIP walks toward and then out the French doors to the garden, BARBARA follows.)

BARBARA Really? Listen, let me ask you. After all the colonial hullabaloo? Is it politically incorrect to be a Rhodes Scholar? Because we're thinking of featuring experts on the website but you know one woman's expert is another woman's -

*(BARBARA's voice trails off as she and TIP disappears into the garden. GEORGIE and ELLE slump in the sitting room. Jimi Hendrix's **Night Bird Flying** plays as the light in the sitting room gradually changes.*

Time passes.

Eventually BARBARA and TIP enter the sitting room, laughing.)

TIP So you can't just say "now." Because that means nothing to them. "Now" is like whenever. So what we had to say was "now now."

BARBARA "Now now?"

TIP "Now now." Like hop it, make tracks, pick up the pace.

BARBARA Now now! I'm going to use that.

Listen. Thanks for this.

(BARBARA hands him a glass.)

I'm really looking forward to meeting Francesca on Monday.

Will you be here?

GEORGIE He lives here.

BARBARA You are so bo-ho.

(BARBARA exits)

TIP Lovely woman.

(GEORGIE takes the glass from him, take them to the kitchen and then returns to the sitting room.)

ELLE I heard a car!

GEORGIE Frankie!

TIP That'll be Barbara's little hot hatch pulling out.

GEORGIE Hot what?

TIP Lovely woman.

(GEORGIE pours herself a glass of wine.

Night Bird Flying *plays as the light in the sitting room gradually goes darker.
More time passes.*

GEORGIE and ELLE slump and TIP falls asleep.)

*(THANDI ENTERS with bags. FRANKIE ENTERS, trailing behind, with luggage
and holding a wrapped bouquet of flowers.)*

THANDI Hello!

(GEORGIE, ELLE and TIP scramble up off the sofa.)

ELLE They're here!

GEORGIE Finally.

FRANKIE I'm here.

GEORGIE Finally.

TIP She's here.

Come here.

(TIP hugs FRANKIE and takes the some of the luggage and the flowers.)

GEORGIE Does your mobile work here? We weren't sure it would work here. We thought
you might miss each other. Well you're not late but you're here.

FRANKIE You look good dad.

GEORGIE And if you couldn't phone/

TIP Better. For seeing you.

GEORGIE We'll get you a phone that works out here.

FRANKIE She was in nappies the last time I was here.

ELLE No, I wasn't. Remember, you brought me that hand-made basket. I strapped it to my bike –
(*ELLE hugs FRANKIE excitedly.*)

THANDI She's kidding sweets.

ELLE Oh.

I still have the basket. But not the bike.

FRANKIE You've still got the basket?
(*touched*)

GEORGIE It's the only African thing I have.

FRANKIE You're an African thing.
(*another hug between them*)

If you bring me the basket – I'll sew a lining into it and make you a handbag.

Very Dorothy meets Shaka Zulu.

THANDI Only Shaka would have eaten Toto!
(*THANDI and FRANKIE find this very funny.*)

GEORGIE I really don't think Shaka ate dogs.
(*THANDI and ELLE break from the group. Arm-in-arm they walk toward the sewing machine before settling into the sofa.*)

THANDI You found her a sewing machine. Clever girl.

ELLE It's my friend Clare's mom's.

THANDI How are you?

(*TIP busies himself moving the luggage to a corner of the room. Sisters FRANKIE and GEORGIE are left together.*)

FRANKIE Georgie.

GEORGIE Frankie. So your phone didn't work?

FRANKIE I don't know. I haven't turned it on. How are you?

GEORGIE Well. It probably won't.
(they hug awkwardly)

FRANKIE Actually. I'm probably. Gamey. I'm. You.

GEORGIE Me? No. That's okay. You're fine.

FRANKIE How's the new job?

GEORGIE Job? Oh. I didn't get it.

FRANKIE Dad said –

GEORGIE It didn't last. After the probationary period they decided they didn't need a part-time book keeper.

But I'm crazy busy. I don't know how I could have done their books and everything else anyway.

They were a funny little group.

FRANKIE I thought it was a dress shop?

GEORGIE Yeah. Funny.

FRANKIE Is that where you got this?
(referring to GEORGIE's shirt, FRANKIE moves to sit with ELLE and THANDI)

GEORGIE Thandi did you have trouble finding her?

THANDI It's an airport –

FRANKIE I walked straight out and there she was. I'm like a homing pigeon.

TIP To home.

(TIP gives THANDI a peck on the cheek by way of thanks)

FRANKIE To her.

(FRANKIE sits on the sofa next to THANDI.)

TIP *(to GEORGIE)* Sit.

Now what can I get you? Red? White? Gin?
(*TIP sees that the bottle of red is nearly empty, the glasses used.*)

FRANKIE Just water for me dad. We had a beer and a sandwich.

(*TIP exits to get drinks from the kitchen.*)

GEORGIE On the plane?

FRANKIE On the way from the airport.

THANDI (*calling out to TIP*) I'll have a large white please.

GEORGIE You stopped? Before?
(*to THANDI*)

THANDI She didn't eat on the plane. She said -

ELLE Are the cushions in here?
(*referring to FRANKIE's luggage*)

FRANKIE In there and those two. Do you want to see them?

GEORGIE Where's your suitcase?

THANDI That's everything.

GEORGIE It looks like you brought every cushion you've ever made.

FRANKIE I did.

ELLE This is nothing. When Urban Bazaar starts selling them they'll make them by the thousands. In China.

GEORGIE I should hope not.

FRANKIE I should hope so. Do you think so?

ELLE That's what this says.

FRANKIE What's that?

ELLE Early shot-gun mood boarding. For your review. The lady from Urban Bazaar dropped it by.

FRANKIE She was here?

TIP *(off stage)* Lovely woman.

(GEORGIE's body language says otherwise.)

FRANKIE I thought we were meeting Monday.

ELLE You are. She's looking forward to seeing you –

GEORGIE And the GLAM –

ELLE On Monday.
What else do you make?

FRANKIE Just cushions.

ELLE You may need to diversify your range. You said you could do handbags?

FRANKIE Too time consuming. But I've started mixing java print with velvet on the cushions. And taking old kente cloth apart.

ELLE What's kente cloth?

FRANKIE Woven fabric, mostly from Ghana.

Get the little bag.

(ELLE brings FRANKIE her suitcase. From it FRANKIE removes a piece of fabric and spreads it out.)

This is kente cloth.

ELLE Oh my God! *("it's beautiful")*

THANDI When were you in Ghana?

FRANKIE I wasn't. A neighbour's husband, he's from Ghana. They were selling it.

Needed the money for school fees.

GEORGIE And you bought it?

FRANKIE As a favour.

ELLE Is it vintage?

FRANKIE Just old.

ELLE Just beautiful.

FRANKIE Put it on.

ELLE Put it on?

FRANKIE Thandi. Show her. You wrap it around your back and waist and carry a baby in it. The neighbour lady carried her boy in it until he was 4. Now he's in school.

(FRANKIE tosses a cushion to ELLE.)

Make this the baby. Thandi knows how.

ELLE I don't want to.
(ELLE drops the cushion onto the floor.)

GEORGIE Try it.

ELLE *(to her mother)* No!

THANDI I'll try.
(THANDI expertly leans forward balancing the cushion on her back then wraps the fabric around her waist creating a sling for carrying the "pillow child" on her back.

TIP enters with filled wine glasses.)

TIP You're a natural.

THANDI Am I?

(THANDI unwraps the fabric and hands it back to FRANKIE. FRANKIE stands up and begins to carefully fold the fabric.)

How's the house Franks?

FRANKIE You wouldn't recognize it. After mum passed we did some major renovation.

GEORGIE And Nick?

FRANKIE What?

GEORGIE How's Nick?

(FRANKIE begins stuffing the fabric back into her small suitcase.)

FRANKIE Nick. Oh God Nick is great. He is so great. And busy. I mean mostly around the house. He filled in to pool. We can't get the chemicals anymore to keep it clean. So we might put a tennis court there next year. Yeah. Busy. He helped Nkomo put up a new gate, one of these modern things with decorative barbed wire. Nick's great, I mean business is slow but he goes into the office every day – you have to. And it'll pick up, it always does. He's great. Nick's great. He's going to run the Comrades marathon to Durban in May. 89 Ks. Yeah he's great.

(pause)

Where's Peter?

GEORGIE Peter? Peter. Same as Nick. You know. Great.

FRANKIE I said *where's* Peter.

GEORGIE *Where's* Peter? Now? Oh.

He plays tennis, doubles. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays after work and every other Saturday morning.

You can come by ours on Sunday. Say hi.

ELLE He's playing Sunday.

GEORGIE He is?

ELLE He booked the court ages ago. He said he told you.
Dad works with Thandi now.
He's got his own parking space.

FRANKIE That's what she said.

ELLE She'd be in a different department if she got this new job which would free her from all the admin work she does now and let her practice medicine. Which is why she became a doctor anyway.

That's what dad said.

THANDI Alright, Polly want a cracker?

ELLE I didn't kill that parrot! I swear. It flew away.

THANDI What parrot?

FRANKIE George? Is Peter going to put in a word for Thandi?

ELLE *(to Thandi)* Clare. She got her learners permit last week but she is such a rubbish driver -

THANDI Franks -

GEORGIE What kind of word?

ELLE *(to Thandi)* We were turning in and this parrot came flying into the windscreen.

TIP What word from Harare?

FRANKIE A good word Georgie. A good word.

THANDI I think I've got the job.

ELLE *(to Thandi)* The thing is she turned on the wipers. She's rubbish.

GEORGIE Of course you have.

TIP Still sunshine and purple agapanthus?

FRANKIE But Peter could swing it for her.

TIP Mbira music in the air and mealies growing by the side of the road?

ELLE The wipers swept the bird away. But not into the road. It flew away, I saw it.

GEORGIE She said she's got it. Do you?

THANDI Probably.

ELLE I didn't kill it!

FRANKIE But you'll speak to Peter?

THANDI It's okay.

(THANDI is speaking to FRANKIE but ELLE takes comfort in her answer.)

GEORGIE *(to THANDI)* Okay I'll say something!

(beat)

TIP Is there still Coca Cola and Fanta pouring from the kitchen taps?

ELLE Soda instead of water?

FRANKIE They're used to be.

GEORGIE No never.

FRANKIE *(to ELLE)* Sometimes, when there's drought, the water runs light brown and everyone says it's because the government's filling the dams with Coke. And Fanta.

GEORGIE Which makes it seem like things are just a little wacky. I'm sorry but it's beyond wacky in Zimbabwe.

FRANKIE Why are you sorry?

You used to love it when Fanta came out of the tap.

GEORGIE We were kids. And it was never Fanta.

(beat)

TIP Is the School of Music still run by that?

FRANKIE No. He passed.

TIP Is Margie Sheldon?

FRANKIE No. Moved to Oz.

TIP Is John de Waal?

FRANKIE Still practicing.

THANDI *(to ELLE, THANDI glares at TIP)* Dr de Waal shared an office with your grandmother.

GEORGIE Dr de Waal.

FRANKIE Still practicing.

GEORGIE And his kooky wife. Anna? Still around.

TIP Ava.

THANDI Her name was Ava. Not Anna.

FRANKIE She passed. Last Christmas.

They sprinkled her ashes at Dumbashowa. Where we put mum's.

THANDI Really.

GEORGIE Mum always said Ava de Waal couldn't cope.

ELLE With what?

GEORGIE With Zimbabwe.

FRANKIE No! With Dr de Waal.

THANDI Oh come on, he was okay.

GEORGIE I always thought he was a little light in the loafers.

ELLE Mum!

FRANKIE He was.

ELLE Say gay.

FANKIE It wasn't like that.

THANDI No it wasn't. Ava ran round.

FRANKIE She did?

THANDI She used to come in at all hours and Dr de Waal would lock her out, and she'd have to sleep on the sun lounger by the pool. Or if it was cold, she'd knock on our door.

TIP She paid your school fees.

THANDI Hush money.

ELLE Why did *she* pay your school fees?

THANDI My mother was a house girl for the de Waal's.

GEORGIE Housekeeper. She was the eyes and ears of that house.

THANDI Whether she liked it or not.

FRANKIE She gave me this.
(FRANKIE reaches into her pocket and removes a shiny medal on a chain.)

THANDI You saw my mother?

FRANKIE To tell her I was coming to see you. And everyone.

THANDI We won this at the 6th form science fair, remember? The effect of colour on memory. We made up a set of cards with coloured pictures on them, and then a second set of cards with the same pictures, but in black and white.

FRANKIE We surveyed every girl in the school; we let them look at the coloured pictures for a minute, and then we turned the cards over and ask them to name the pictures one by one. Then we did the same with black and white pictures.

ELLE What was the result?

FRANKIE I don't remember.

THANDI I don't remember this being on a chain.

FRANKIE Your mom. She was wearing it around her neck. She always wears it.
 She'd love to see you.

THANDI Is that what she said?

FRANKIE No. But I know she would.

THANDI She wouldn't. She'd be angry if I. Went back.
 I'm sorry.

ELLE Why are you sorry?

FRANKIE She had something for you dad. These.

(FRANKIE removes from her pocket a folded up piece of paper, in it buttons. She hands it to TIP.)

ELLE What are they?

FRANKIE Buttons.

THANDI From a dress.

ELLE Your mom took buttons off her dress?

THANDI No, not her dress. These are lovely.

ELLE But buttons?

GEORGIE A gift's a gift.

TIP Yes it is. *(to Thandi)* Thank you.

THANDI I should go.

(she turns away from him)

ELLE Already?

FRANKIE We'll see her tomorrow.

GEORGIE Tomorrow?

THANDI We're going to Petticoat Market tomorrow. You should come.

GEORGIE Tomorrow?

FRANKIE Thandi says they sell java print at a market over by Liverpool Street.

ELLE Can I come?

GEORGIE No.

FRANKIE Yeah. We'll get the fabric for your handbag.

GEORGIE You're going to the Vigil with me. You said.

(to Frankie) And you.

I thought.

ELLE Mum. We can do that anytime. You're there every Saturday.

GEORGIE That's how a Vigil works.

FRANKIE You're vigiling?

GEORGIE I am. I'm the assistant treasurer.

ELLE Come with us. Please?

GEORGIE I can't miss this Saturday. And. I was hoping you'd donate one of your cushions.

We're sponsoring a tombola to raise money to upgrade The Vigil's website.

THANDI You should go.

FRANKIE Take a cushion. Take any one you like.

I need to get more fabric tomorrow.

THANDI We could go to the market on Sunday?

FRANKIE I need to sew on Sunday.

ELLE Clare's mum needs the sewing machine back by Monday.

FRANKIE There you go.

GEORGIE You said Tuesday. I told everyone -

FRANKIE *(looking inside the folder)* I've got to be ready for – Barbara.

GEORGIE Surely this is enough cushions?

TIP There'll be other Saturdays.
(TIP squeezes GEORGIE's arm affectionately)

ELLE Exactly! Please go to the market with us. Please?

Tell her she can miss one Saturday.

FRANKIE She could miss them all.

GEORGIE I have committed myself to standing watch for Zimbabwe. I'm putting that bastard on notice.

FRANKIE Everybody needs a hobby.

GEORGIE Like running up cushions?

(pause)

FRANKIE Dad? Can you help me? With these?

(FRANKIE hugs THANDI)
Thanks. Tomorrow.

THANDI Tomorrow.

FRANKIE *(exiting)* I need a shower.

Where's the loo?

TIP George ("show her")
(TIP hands GEORGIE Frankie's small suitcase.)

GEORGIE Follow me.

(FRANKIE and GEORGIE exit with one suitcase, leaving the bags of cushions in the sitting room.)

TIP busies himself getting a vase for the flowers that arrived with Frankie.)

ELLE What time shall we leave for the market? Let's go early. We can have breakie at the cafe.

Should you drive or should we tube?

What time 9.30? 10.30?

THANDI Elliot.

It's time to talk to your mother.

ELLE About what?

THANDI I think you need to tell her.

ELLE You told her?

THANDI No. But it's time for you to.

ELLE No!
You said I would never have to tell her.
You said.

THANDI I didn't know it would be like this.
When I helped you I had no idea Frankie was coming back.

ELLE Oh great, you told Aunt Frankie!

THANDI I haven't told anyone. You told him.

ELLE He said I should tell you. You never said, "tell mum."

TIP Can we leave it? Frankie's here.

ELLE It never goes away, if that's what you think. I think about it all the time.

THANDI I know. I see. But I honestly think you could stop thinking about it if you told your mother. I would have told my mother.

ELLE Tell? My mother? If I tell her it will become a thing. Then it will become a bigger thing and then when it's a huge thing, it will become her thing. Her latest thing.

When Lola got feline cancer and died, she volunteered at The Battersea Dogs Home and smelled like cat piss all the time. When the congestion charge stretched out to about Shepherds Bush, she started riding her bike everywhere, and smelled like the back of bus all the time. And now, now that Zimbabwe's a mess, she's assistant treasurer for the Vigil and comes home every Saturday smelling like, well. I'm sorry, but she smells like Zimbabweans.

THANDI Why are you sorry?

ELLE Those people stink.

THANDI You are those people!

(to TIP) She's uneasy with the odour of life.
What are we doing?

(THANDI sits down on the sofa, despairing.)

ELLE Helping me.

TIP Helping her.

(ELLE sits next to THANDI.)

ELLE She's. She's intense. Always trying to be something. Some new thing. I mean doesn't she know? I'm trying to be something.

THANDI Lately you've been something. Irresponsible.

TIP Don't be hard on her.

THANDI (to TIP) You asked me to help.
(to ELLE) Have you asked her? For help?

ELLE Should I have to?

Can't she just be who ever she is, by now?

You're who you are.

(Fade to black.)

It is late on Friday.

The lights come up a little. It is night. SALLY is sitting on the sofa and has FRANKIE's head in her lap. SALLY is stroking her hair. FRANKIE is asleep but stirring. The kente cloth has been cut and taken apart and the sewing machine has been used.)

Scene 2, FRIDAY NIGHT

SALLY Shhh. Be my good girl. Shhh.

FRANKIE Mum.
(groggy)

SALLY I'm right here. Momma's right here.

FRANKIE Momma?

SALLY Shhh. Be a clever girl for mamma.

(Frankie sits bolt upright.)

FRANKIE You're not my mother!

SALLY Of course I am.
(remaining calm)

FRANKIE No you're not! You are not my mother.

SALLY Be my good girl.

FRANKIE I'm not your girl!
You never had any children.

SALLY Neither did you.

FRANKIE That's not the point.

The point is I'm Katherine Starling's daughter. Me, I am Doctor Kate Starling's youngest daughter. The one who stayed!

SALLY And aren't you every inch your mother's daughter.

FRANKIE Yes. No!

SALLY No? Then if you're not your mother's daughter, you must be *my* daughter.

FRANKIE I'm not your daughter!

SALLY Your father was good to me.

FRANKIE Was he?

SALLY Very good.
(smiling)

FRANKIE Shut up!

SALLY You came all this way to speak to me. All this way to ask me. You don't mean to shut me up.

FRANKIE Oh I do mean to shut you up!

SALLY I will wait.

FRANKIE For what?

SALLY For you. You came to see me. I am flattered.

FRANKIE Don't be. I came to see my family.

SALLY Your sister? Georgie? Is she who you came to see?

FRANKIE Yes .

SALLY Doesn't she have a lovely family? Peter, devoted husband and a doctor.

FRANKIE He's not a doctor. He's a hospital administrator.

SALLY He's got his own parking space.

And that lovely daughter of theirs, Elliot. A perfect family with a routine and traditions and your father nearby to celebrate with them at holidays and petrol and well stocked shelves and low inflation.

FRANKIE Peter's a twat.

SALLY He's nothing like your Nick. Is he?

FRANKIE Nick's great! Anyway, I came to see Thandi.

SALLY So then you didn't come to see your sister?

FRANKIE Thandi is like a sister.

SALLY So many sisters.

FRANKIE Only two.

SALLY Two sisters
Two wives.
And now two mothers.

But only one man.

FRANKIE One man ruining everything.

SALLY Do you mean my man or do you mean your man? Or do you mean your father?

FRANKIE I don't want to talk about it.

SALLY But you do want to know why he went native.

FRANKIE *(fury)* Nick went native when he married me!

SALLY I see now.

So you are African?

FRANKIE You know I'm Zimbabwean!

SALLY Then I *am* your mother. She *is* your sister.

FRANKIE Georgie is my sister. Kate was my mother. Tip is my father. End of.

SALLY I see you now. You are a selfish child.
You must learn to share.

FRANKIE Share!

SALLY I shared my country with you.

FRANKIE My father wasn't enough?

SALLY It is a big country.

FRANKIE It's a fucked country!

SALLY It is your home.

FRANKIE I hate to admit it, but my home is fucked.

SALLY *(forcefully)* Then don't. Admit!

(once again calm, and a little defeated) But it is fucked. She has fucked it. With her shopping and her children. She has led him astray.

(obsessed) She has fed his beast!

FRANKIE Your sister? She did all that?

SALLY She is not my sister!

FRANKIE No?

SALLY (*proudly*) I am from Ghana.

FRANKIE I see you now. Mother of Zimbabwe but sister to none?

But for the God of Grace go I?

SALLY What did she have that I didn't?

FRANKIE (*incensed*) You tell me!

(*quietly*) You tell me. Tell me.

(*FRANKIE lies back down on the sofa. SALLY comforts her.*)

Tell me.

(*FRANKIE sleeps*

(*SALLY exits.*

Gradually lights up. ELLE enters, wearing the same clothes as before and the state of her hair indicates she has been out all night. She attempts to enter quietly so as not wake FRANKIE. TIP enters from the kitchen with a cup of tea.)

Scene 3, SATURDAY MORNING

ELLE (*whispering*) Has mom called?

TIP Twice.

ELLE Did you tell her?

TIP You popped over her last night here about 9.30 and fell asleep in the chair.

ELLE And?

TIP You accidently left your phone at Clare's.

ELLE Perfect. Thanks.

TIP She's on her way over.

ELLE *(moaning)* I need a cup of tea.

(TIP and ELLE exit.)

FRANKIE awakes. She folds the blankets, locates her trousers and puts them on. She then begins taking cushions from the bags and arranges them in a line on the sofa. She stands back and looks at them, all of them. ELLE enters.)

ELLE They're gorgeous.

FRANKIE You think?

ELLE Oh yeah.
(ELLE sits and brushes her hair.)
How many more will you make?

FRANKIE Depends on what kind of fabric they've got at the market.

ELLE I can't wait.

FRANKIE Is that why you're here so early? Or are you late?

ELLE I popped in. Last night. To see granddad. I was over at Clare's but it was boring so I stopped here. I fell asleep in the chair.

FRANKIE What time did you pop in?

ELLE About 10.30

FRANKIE I thought it was 9.30.

ELLE I did stop over here. I do stop over. Sometimes. There's this guy – we're close and I was with Clare last night, for awhile. It's just mom won't let me stay out past/

FRANKIE I'm not your mother.

ELLE No.

FRANKIE *(with one cushion in each hand)* Which is your favourite?

ELLE That one. (*ELLE points to one and FRANKIE sets it aside.*)

Do you ever wish. You had kids?

FRANKIE I always thought I would but when I didn't, I got over it.

(*again with a cushion in each hand*) This one or this one?

ELLE (*pointing*) That one. Definitely that one.

But are you sad that you can't?

FRANKIE I suspect I can.

You don't think it's too busy?

ELLE That's the point, right? It's like a little fabric explosion that landed in the shape of a turkey.

(*ELLE sets the selected cushion aside.*)

FRANKIE A guinea fowl.

I'm hyper about birth control. After my slip up, I felt like had to be.

(*again FRANKIE stands with a cushion in each hand and with her body language asks "this one or this one?"*)

ELLE Um, I'd say - that one. It's like Born Free with fabric.

What slip up?

FRANKIE That's Kenya.

I got pregnant. When I was 17.

ELLE You got pregnant?

FRANKIE Shhh! Dad doesn't know. It's not his thing.

ELLE (*whispering*) You. Got pregnant? What happened?

FRANKIE (*again FRANKIE holds up two cushions for ELLE to select from*)

Georgie was at uni. She met me and mum in Pretoria.

Mum made it into a shopping trip. Like it was no big thing.

I went into a private clinic in the morning, had it done and after 3 hours of rest and a glass of orange juice we were picking out new shoes and matching handbags.

ELLE Thandi never said anything.

FRANKIE Thandi doesn't know.

ELLE But she's like. Family.

FRANKIE Your mother is. Family.

I was glad she was there. She made it better.

(incredulous) I can't believe she didn't tell you.

(FRANKIE holds out the cushions still in her hands.)

Come on, this one or this one?

ELLE That one.
(ELLE points at a cushion.)

No. She never tells.
(TIP enters)

TIP Okay girls, who wants eggs? I'm buying.

FRANKIE Come on. You said you can't wait.

Come on.

(TIP, ELLE and FRANKIE exit.)

The sitting room sits. Quiet. Full of cushions.

SALLY enters with a cup of tea and stands behind the sofa.)

GEORGIE *(off stage)* Dad? Hi. Franks?

(Enter GEORGIE)

Elle.

(GEORGIE sees all the cushions and faces the sofa, therefore facing SALLY.)

Oh my.

Well.

Okay they are beautiful.

Except for this one. A turkey?

SALLY It is a guinea fowl.

GEORGIE Oh. I see. It's a guinea fowl.

(GEORGIE exits, upstairs)

SALLY The Ndebele people tell a story about a woman who took a guinea fowl for her child. Her name was Nosipho. *(SALLY embraces the guinea fowl cushion.)* She was married but no matter how hard she tried she could not give her husband a baby. So Nosipho's husband took a second wife. The second wife gave the husband many children and while Nosipho was kind to the children, the second wife taunted Nosipho.

For months Nosipho ploughed her fields like a good wife, a right wife. Then one day, a guinea fowl came to her and said "I'm lonely like you. Why don't you make me your child?" So she took him in and cared for him and she began to feel happy with her guinea fowl child.

But the second wife continued to taunt Nosipho asking her why she ploughed her fields when she had no children to feed?

In the night the guinea fowl asked, "Mother why do you bear the insults of the second wife?" Nosipho could think of no reply but her child - he had a plan. From the tallest tree her guinea fowl began to sing,

Grain for us, for you and me
Grain to eat, don't wait, come see.
Come one, come all, I call you clear
Come all for one, my friends, my dear.

And then all the guinea fowl from miles around descended on the *second* wife's field.

You might think this second wife would be afraid, but she was not. She was hard and graceless. She killed the guinea fowl and his friends and cooked them for

her husband and her to eat. But. As soon as they had eaten the guinea fowl the sound of singing came from their stomachs. It was the guinea fowl singing the guinea fowl song. This frightened them so they began stabbing at their stomachs with knives to try to stop the noise. They pierced their skin and blood flowed from their bellies and from their wounds, out came the guinea fowl and his friends, pecking and singing for joy, happy to be free. Nosipho was happy too; she no longer had to endure the taunts of the second wife. And she felt lucky to have such a clever and unusual child.

(GEORGIE enters the sitting room wearing the red Zimbabwe Vigil t-shirt. She stops in front of the sofa and selects a cushion, and then takes a leftover tea cup to the kitchen.)

Always another wife. Always.
If he has a fussy mother,
if he has an older sister or, even if he has an efficient business partner,
then he has another wife.

Her husband.
He has another wife. His tennis partner.
Two men like a couple married 20 years.
(SALLY mimes hitting a ball with a tennis racquet.)
Yours.
Mine.
Yours.
Mine.

(GEORGIE returns from the kitchen with a carrier bag and puts the cushion in it, prepared to depart.)

GEORGIE Should I go to the market?

SALLY *(preparing to depart)* She doesn't like me, but I like her.

GEORGIE No. No. No. The Vigil.
(exits)

SALLY She is putting the bastard on notice!

(SALLY exits making a celebratory ululating sound.)

Again the sitting room sits.

The light in the room changes and presently FRANKIE and THANDI are in the sitting room with bags of fabric from the market.)

Scene 4, SATURDAY AFTERNOON

FRANKIE Have you heard anything about the job yet?

THANDI Since yesterday? No. But it's that "no news is good news" kind of thing.

FRANKIE Really?

(beat)

(THANDI remove folded fabric from a bag.)

THANDI Does this smell funny?

FRANKIE It's the vegetable dye. In the fabric.

(She takes in deep sniff of air through her nose)

I like it. It smells promising.

THANDI When did you start sewing?

FRANKIE I've always sewn.

THANDI Yeah but because you had to. Not because you wanted to.

FRANKIE One night I was in our guest bedroom, and I couldn't sleep. That's where we keep mom's old sewing machine, and I just started making stuff.

(pause)

THANDI What were you doing in the guest bedroom?

FRANKIE Not sleeping.

(She removes folded fabric from a bag.)

This is a good one, isn't it. The print is the right size for cushions. And this.

I'm really nervous about what they'll think of them.

THANDI Really?

FRANKIE Really.

THANDI I'm sorry Franks – I thought this was a "two-birds-with-one-stone" thing. You know, see the family and *maybe* flog a few cushions while you're here. This is really important.

FRANKIE This saving lives thing Dr Ntebewe, it's really important?

THANDI Yeah you're right, they're the same.

FRANKIE Okay they're not.

THANDI I hardly save lives. I'm a GP.

FRANKIE I don't want to go back empty handed.

THANDI Did you arrive empty handed?

FRANKIE Yes.

(FRANKIE turns away from THANDI, and looking upstage she sees TIP and SALLY kissing.)

THANDI What's been taken?

FRANKIE The blink. From my eyes.

Oh God Thandi.

(FRANKIE turns back to THANDI. Lights down on TIP and SALLY.)

I saw him. Rogering Sally.

THANDI Saw who?

FRANKIE Nick.

THANDI Nick?

You caught him?

FRANKIE Rogering Sally.
Going native.
Engaging in east African activities.

Let's see? Can I make it any uglier?

THANDI No.

FRANKIE Believe me. I can.

THANDI Who was it?

FRANKIE Mandisa Ncube. She works with him.

THANDI A one off?

FRANKIE Occasionally. That's what he said.

THANDI So every chance he got.

FRANKIE He said she came on to him –

THANDI Rubbish.

FRANKIE He said it was just sex. *Just sex?*

THANDI *(sarcastically)* Oh, if they weren't playing house, then all's forgiven?

FRANKIE He said she wanted more but *he* was getting ready to tell her it was over. He'd been feeling horrible about it for months. He invited her round –

THANDI To your house?

FRANKIE To dump her.

I wasn't meant to be home for hours.

Her skirt was in the foyer.
(FRANKIE rifles through the fabrics and finding the 'right' one, wraps it around her waist.)
A skirt like this!

Turns out he needed to get his face between her forks for a proper send off.

I walked in.
He looked up.
I walked out.

I think he gave her the keys to his car because I heard it pull out of the drive. Be careful love – the brakes are shot! Shame but we can't get parts anymore, so take it easy round the turns.

THANDI What did he say?

FRANKIE He said he was grateful.

THANDI Grateful?

FRANKIE Grateful that I'd caught him. He said it was our chance to "reboot our relationship."

THANDI He talks shit.

FRANKIE We talked all night.
Until midnight.
But I stopped hearing him at 10.17.

THANDI What happened?

FRANKIE At 10.17, he said the problem was. I'd become more like.
His mother.

THANDI What did you say?

FRANKIE I said, "fuck you Nick – I think you'll find I've become more like my mother."

THANDI I don't think -

FRANKIE I do! All I do is think. Anger, denial, depression, acceptance. All of it. And now.
Now it's me, just me, stuck in this state of awe that keeps me asking, "wasn't my
sweat and skin and cum and pussy soiled enough? Wasn't I wild and childless
and rough enough?"

THANDI You are. I'm sure -

FRANKIE Down on all fours, gasping and grunting – that's how he likes it you know.

THANDI Okay.

FRANKIE Over and over I see their beastly scene.

THANDI Don't -

FRANKIE I do. You know? I can hear her squeal and I can see him wince.

THANDI She's a woman, not a farm animal.

FRANKIE Isn't she? You forget I know what he's like. I know what he does.

THANDI Stop it.

FRANKIE Don't! He'll say don't shower tonight pet and don't shave this week. Turn over, and say you're a whore for me. Say it, he'll whisper through his teeth. Louder!

THANDI Frankie!

FRANKIE I was fucking feral. For him! But then he decides I'm too tame? That's the ugly in me Thandi. See it? All Nick did was cheat – I'm the one riding the swell of putrid questions that loop in my head, over and over like a joy ride through a fun house. I'm the one!

(pause)

THANDI What do you want to know?

FRANKIE What?

THANDI The putrid questions going round in your head? I'll answer them.

FRANKIE You can't.

THANDI No? Come on. I haven't had it off with your Nick but I've done a few of yours.

FRANKIE Not here. Not now.

THANDI Where then? Georgie's? Tomorrow?

FRANKIE No! Promise you won't tell Georgie, you've got to promise!

(beat)

THANDI What then. What do you want to know?

Are we wetter, better, slower, dirtier? Sour or sickly sweet? Do we tang in a way that your big chiefs just can't resist?

FRANKIE Stop it!

THANDI Do we bend over and beg, or do we mount them and demand our own? Do I lick my fingers when I pull them out, is that what you want to know? Or do I cackle and spit when he grabs my hair and calls me bitch? What's up Franks? Allow me to fill in the blanks!

FRANKIE It's not like that.

THANDI Then what's it like. Tell me. What's it like!

FRANKIE Rhodesia.

It's like I'm. Rhodesia.

THANDI Now *you're* talking shit.

FRANKIE The world got smaller, not bigger. We're all closer together and by comparison. By comparison -

THANDI Frankie.

FRANKIE You're exotic. I'm. Faded.
You're mysterious. I'm. Nostalgia.
You're authentic. I'm. Superseded.

THANDI You're not.

FRANKIE Exactly! I'm *only*. What I'm not.

You know it was Nick who never wanted children. He said we should remain children ourselves but now he claims I'm his mother?

I'm not Georgie, you know? It's my home, not a sandwich board to wear on weekends. I'm not here to put the bastard on notice. He doesn't see me either.

No thank you, I'm not English, I'm not Australian and, no I'm not Afrikaans. I'm Zimbabwean if it's all the same to – anyone.

No one mistakes me for mademoiselle but still, I'm not old enough to surrender to morning cocktails and big caftans, am I? Am I?

I walked in on him and it's like a sign lit up. It said "Welcome to Rhodesia." The place stale white women go to spend their remaining days cutting and pasting their faces.

(ELLE enters with java print fabric wrapped around her head.)

ELLE Okay.

What do you think?

Too African?

(Nkosi Sikelel i'Africa plays, light to half.

FRANKIE sits at the sewing machine making working on a cushion.

GEORGIE enters. She goes to the kitchen and places a mismatched tea set on the coffee table.)

ELLE shows her mother the all fabric they have purchased and eventually removes the fabric from her head.

TIP enters and situates himself on a chair with the guitar.

All the while THANDI stands frozen.

Eventually ELLE and GEORGIE exit out the front door and FRANKIE exits upstairs

*As the music comes down TIP is playing **Nkosi Sikelel i'Africa** on his guitar.*

The sofa remains stuffed with cushions.)

Scene 5, MONDAY LATE AFTERNOON

THANDI Can we talk?

TIP God Bless Africa.

THANDI I know. Tip/

TIP Enoch Sontonga wrote it in 1897. There are words in every language.

THANDI Tip – we need to tell Frankie.

TIP Everyone wants to bless Africa don't they? It's been translated into Shona, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa. I once heard it sung in Italian. It used to be Zimbabwe's national anthem. It's still Zambia's and Namibia's.

THANDI I know.

TIP And the African National Congress's.

THANDI Okay.

TIP Your mother taught me the words.

THANDI Yes. I know. Tip/

TIP Every few days she'd teach me another line until I knew the whole thing.

THANDI You're rubbish with words. But your tune's always beautiful.

TIP Is that what she said? Your mum?

THANDI That's what I saw. I used to watch you. You would ring the bell on your bike and my mother would run to the gate and let you in. I would hide behind the wall of purple agapanthus. Watching.

You always had a something for her. A flower, some mealies. Old buttons. A song.

TIP Just a few lines I'd compose in my head.

THANDI On your way over.

TIP Had to keep her sweet.

THANDI I know what you had to do!

I watched you and I wondered, and I hoped and I prayed.

I watched you and my mother go into the de Waal's house. You'd always hold the door for her. And you'd smile at her – and she wouldn't come out until you'd left.

Of course she was just your look out. Her eyes and ears were all you wanted. Not her lips or her skin. Or her body.

But for all those months when I was just a little girl. A fatherless little girl. When you were coming for Ava de Waal, I wanted you to come for my mother.

TIP I'm sorry. I didn't know.

THANDI I was stupid.

TIP You were young. I was stupid.

But that's how it was Thandiwe. It was Rhodesia. Back then.

THANDI And we're Rhodesia now. We're all bloody Rhodesia.

All of us who won't say - - for fear of sounding bitter.
Rhodesia.
You and me and Georgie, and God, your granddaughter.

And Frankie.

God Frankie. Will she be relieved? I mean her father didn't go native after all.
Halleluia! Turns out she's *not* her mother's daughter. Does this make it better.
Or worse?

TIP I know this has got under your skin. Your mother never should have sent over those buttons. But I didn't like them anymore than you did. That was very naughty of her.

THANDI Naughty is this stupid rumour you started about Sally Mugabe.

TIP I didn't start it. Your mother started that, not me. Not. Me. As soon as I left Rhodesia she told everyone I was here in Ealing "rogering Sally." She said if everyone believed I was having an affair with a black woman then they'd be so busy tut tut-ing and rubbing their hands with that sweaty morsel, the truth would go unnoticed. Un-rumoured.

I think it was her way of protecting me.

THANDI You?

She must have been protecting Ava.

Ava paid my school fees.

TIP Six and two threes.
I was young, I carried on, I had an affair. My daughters know that.
Does it really matter who it was?

THANDI That depends.

TIP On what?

THANDI Who it was!

TIP Thandi. They never ask.

They let it lie.
Coke and Fanta pouring from the taps and parrots in Walpole park.
My girls love a good story.

(SALLY enters from the garden.)

THANDI They were little girls.

TIP You're all little girls. Who don't want to know.

(SALLY's face and body language express she is considering herself.)

THANDI Your daughters graciously ignored the fact that you left them when they were babies!

TIP Then why don't you?

THANDI Do you have any concern for my mother? Their mother?

TIP Their mother threw me out.

SALLY That's when he moved to Ealing.

THANDI Their mother caught you with Ava de Waal.

TIP *(his charm run out, anger is revealed)* And whose fault was that?

(THANDI turns away from him.)

SALLY Don't look at me.

THANDI You twat! You stupid, arrogant twat!

TIP *(immediately regretful)* I'm sorry. God forgive me Thandi.
It was my fault of course it was but.
It was Rhodesia.

THANDI The funny thing is, my mother had no interest in you. She didn't want you. And I bet Sally Mugabe didn't give your shrivelled arse a second look either.

SALLY Hmm. *("maybe I looked")*

TIP I said I was sorry. What do you want love?

THANDI For 17 years I slept every night in the same bed with my mother. For 17 years she had no one. No one!

She didn't want you, but you wanted her. There, in that house. Starring out the window. Listening. Listening to you hump Ava de Waal. You wanted her to hear every moan, every groan, every squeal of ecstasy, every sigh of release.

TIP What do you want from me -

(THANDI, near tears, kisses TIP on the lips.)

SALLY A women.
A little girl.
Two.
Always two.

(a knock at the front door)

FRANKIE *(off stage)* Dad! Will you get the door? I'll be right down.

TIP *(he touches his lipstick stained lips)*
I am so sorry.

(TIP exits through the French doors that lead to the garden and SALLY follows him.)

THANDI What am I doing?

(another knock)

FRANKIE *(off stage)* Dad. Will you get that?

THANDI Your dad stepped out.

FRANKIE *(off stage)* Thandi?

THANDI I'll get it.

(she goes to the front door, off stage)

(off stage) Hello. Come in. Frankie -

BARBARA *(off stage)* Hi. Hang on. No I'm here.

(THANDI and BARBARA enter the sitting room. BARBARA is on her mobile phone.)

BARBARA *(into the phone)* No! You tell her that if her team or family or daughters or whatever she wants to call them can only crank out 6 beaded tops a week then we can't go live on the site until she's coughed up sufficient inventory. No live, no pay.

(THANDI goes to the kitchen and returns with a kettle of hot water that she pours into the tea pot on the table.)

No! Do not let her con you. She knows exactly what she's doing. We've been through all this before.

When she sold us the coin purses? She is hard core I'm telling you but I want those tops. PR's already advanced a photo so don't piss her off, just make it clear that six might as well be none as far as we're concerned.

Okay gotta' dash. No, there's no way I'll be back in today. I'm in Zone 4. I know. Cheers!

THANDI Three.

BARBARA I'm sorry?

THANDI It's Zone 3.

BARBARA Three, four, I'm no good west of Notting Hill.

(she spots the cushions on the sofa)

Oh. Yes. These. They are what we need. Okay.

(she selects a cushion and squeezes it to her breast)

We are so excited about these. Did you have a look at the mood board? We think we can connect you to a highly desirable niche market that's looking for the kind of cultural brand experience we feel this product can offer if we position it on a virtual opt-in-vehicle that's ethnically real but fresh.

(FRANKIE enters from upstairs)

THANDI I think her product will love that.

FRANKIE Hi. I'm Francesca Starling Heard. You must be Barbara.

BARBARA Francesca?

FRANKIE Everyone calls me Frankie.

THANDI Barbara was just saying how much she loves your cushions. I think.

FRANKIE *(aside to THANDI)* Thanks. *(“for being here”)*

Dad? *(“where is he”)*

(THANDI shrugs and begins to pour tea for FRANKIE and BARBARA.)

THANDI Tea?

BARBARA Yes. Thank you -?

THANDI Thandi.

BARBARA You’re from Zimbabwe?

THANDI Yes. Frankie and I went to school together.

BARBARA But you work here?

THANDI Yes.

BARBARA Do you. Make anything?

THANDI Like. What?

BARBARA I don’t know. Anything – jewellery, sculpture?

THANDI No. I’m a doctor.

Barbara was saying she *really* likes the cushions.

FRANKIE Really?

BARBARA Oh yes. Yes.
(BARBARA squeezes another cushion to her breast)

Lovely, exactly what we’re looking for.

Funny aren’t they. Cushy. Like little babies. You just want to hug them.

FRANKIE Thanks. You have children?

BARBARA God no.
(she returns the cushion to the sofa)

FRANKIE These are the very latest.
(FRANKIE pulls two more cushions from a bag.)

And I am thinking of diversifying my range. I have a handbag in mind. In the design phase.

But these - you think they'll sell?

BARBARA I've got to be honest.
(BARBARA looks at THANDI, which she reads as her cue to exit. She slips into the kitchen.)

Our fusing strategy is going to need tweaking. I mean the selling narrative has to have some basis in reality, right? We'll have to see if Creative can re-jig.

Now that you're white.

FRANKIE Now that I'm white? I've always been white.

BARBARA Listen I want this as much as you. I adore these. But the whole fair trade, tribal-based indigenous peoples brandscape can get so right up its own black side.

FRANKIE Did you say --

BARBARA I did, and I mean it, and I'm sorry. But I'm an unapologetic change agent for the ethnic entrepreneur. And I know if you're not authentic then you might as well get in line behind every other high street Juan come-lately.

Frankie, we proceeded, marketing wise, on the assumption that you were African.

FRANKIE I am. African.

BARBARA Of course you are, I just mean for our purposes I, we wrongly -- and it's our problem not yours -- saw you in our heads. Differently. I mean don't get me wrong we are falling all over ourselves to capitalize on the whole Zimbabwean zeitgeist. We have to, while it's still got currency.

(She embraces a cushion.) And if this doesn't scream indigenality I don't know what does.

FRANKIE But you don't want them.

BARBARA I want them like nobody's business. But that's not the point.

You. The creator of this so-called Zimbabwean thing. You complicate the sale.

FRANKIE They're just cushions.

BARBARA Just cushions?

They're longing and desire, missed opportunity, found nostalgia, grit certainly, but not too gritty, artefactual flotsam and jetsam reconstituted for a modern audience, plucked from a place where people are close to the earth.

FRANKIE I'm from Harare - not a farm, if that's what you were thinking.

BARBARA Farm? I'm thinking bush. You know, wild and undiscovered. Unclaimed wind and sky.

FRANKIE Zimbabwe's actually claimed, it's really very claimed.

BARBARA The thing is, and why would you know this, every product has got to have a narrative, a selling story if you like and every selling story has to thrive outside the product.

The product is like fruit that falls from a tree that has its roots in a magical marketing narrative, a true -- ish legend. A true tree legend. Or a legendary tree. Or a story telling vine. Or a parable bush from which to pluck the product.

You know?

FRANKIE You need a story?

BARBARA Yes and no. A certain kind of story.

Urban Bazaar is all about making the crowded, complicated global souk, simple and undemanding. Simplicity is what today's ethical urban consumer wants. Dare I say needs.

(referring to the cushions) If we say these are fruit, where's the tree Frankie? Where's the parable bush?

I am sorry but I don't think you've got the bush we're looking for.

FRANKIE Okay. Okay!

 Here's the thing.

 My father had an affair with Sally Mugabe. The wife of Robert Mugabe. Her.
 And my dad.

 In this house.

 When she was living here in exile back in the 70s.

BARBARA Interesting. Mythical maybe. Legend? Story? Yeah okay.

 But Frankie, Sally Mugabe couldn't have been 12 years old in the 70s. That's not
 the kind of story that sells cushions.

FRANKIE Twelve? Where'd you get twelve?

BARBARA Your people and Wikipedia.

FRANKIE My people?

BARBARA That charming man – with the funny name? Tip!

FRANKIE That's my dad.

BARBARA Your dad? *Your* dad?

 Well he told me all about Zimbabwe. And I'm sure he said the all shopping Mrs
 Mugabe is much younger than bad boy Bob. She's my age.

FRANKIE That's Grace. Grace is his younger wife. Sally's his first wife.

BARBARA He's got two wives. Don't they all?

FRANKIE No. Sally's dead.

BARBARA Oh. Okay.

 Once upon a tyrant's first wife. Tell me more.

FRANKIE In the late 60s, when we were still Rhodesia –

BARBARA Rhodesia! God who says that?

FRANKIE Before we were Zimbabwe!

Before we were Zimbabwe, Robert was in prison for freedom fighting. Sally had to flee the country or she'd have been locked up too or worse. She came to London and lived in a bedsit here - 20 Madeley Road. This was all bedsits before dad bought the freehold. At about the time Sally was leaving Zimbabwe, so was my father – he came here to take a job at Ealing Studios. He's a musician. Someone told him he'd find other Africans here. So he ended up in the bedsit across the hall from her. That's when it happened.

BARBARA What's he have to say about her now?

FRANKIE Nothing. He never talks about it.

I found out when I was six. My mother, she was a doctor –

BARBARA Your mother was a doctor and your father a musician? Huge power imbalance. No wonder it didn't work.

FRANKIE She was working at the hospital a lot, because dad was gone by then.

Me and Georgie, my sister, played outside the hospital while mum did her rounds.

There'd be women by the side of the road roasting mealies and you could ask the little black kids to run out to the road and get you one. Old men would be playing cards and you could watch them and see if they were cheating and if a car drove up everyone would wait to see who got out. One time I remember Ava de Waal got out of a car. I think she was pregnant – but she never had a baby.

This one day I ran past a flock of women – I was racing Georgie to the Bilboa tree - and when I ran past, I heard one of them say "that's the one, that one's dad rogered Sally Mugabe."

She said it like I wasn't even there. I didn't know what she meant, I only knew it was vile. It had that horrible harmony of words like kaffir and goffel. Mum always said better to say fucker than kaffir.

BARBARA What did your mother say about Sally?

FRANKIE She never spoke of it.

BARBARA It didn't bother her?

FRANKIE Of course it bothered her. Christ it bothered her.

BARBARA But she didn't talk about it?

FRANKIE She didn't want to make it into a big thing. I guess.

BARBARA Well it's a big thing now!

Do you think we could get something else? To drink?

FRANKIE Juice?

BARBARA Gin. Let's toast the latest member of the Urban Bazaar family.

FRANKIE Really?
You want the cushions?

BARBARA Oh yes, I want the cushions.

FRANKIE Thank you. Thank you so much!

Gin!
And tonic?

BARBARA Little.

(FRANKIE exits to the kitchen. BARBARA picks up a cushion and hugs it to her breast.)

Ah Frankie. You sat at the hem of Sally's dress, sewing her scraps into little bits of lovely. You have forgiven her. Even where your mother could not.

You are the new daughter of Africa.

(GEORGIE enters)

GEORGIE Hi? My dad rang. He asked me to pop in.

BARBARA Hello.

GEORGIE Hi I'm Georgie.
We met -

BARBARA Georgie! *The* Georgie.

GEORGIE *(referring to the cushion Barbara is still squeezing)* So you like them.

BARBARA Oh God I love them. These may be our breakout product of the year. These are going to get people right here. These are so right, so real, so honest. You know, they're sordid but with a gracious after taste. They're transgression *and* absolution.

GEORGIE The cushions?

BARBARA Sit. Sit.

Tell me about your Zimbabwe.

GEORGIE My Zimbabwe?

I'm the assistant treasurer of the Zimbabwe Vigil. We stand watch outside Zimbabwe House on The Strand every Saturday in protest of the gross violations of human rights by the current corrupt regime. And we will continue to do so until there are internationally monitored free and fair elections.

BARBARA The Strand. You don't live in Zimbabwe?

GEORGIE I was born there but I live in Chiswick.

BARBARA Do any Zimbabweans live in Zimbabwe?

(FRANKIE enters with two gin and tonics. THANDI stands in the kitchen door with a drink, and then returns to the kitchen when she sees GEORGIE.)

FRANKIE I do.

(FRANKIE hands a drink to BARBARA and takes a swig from her own glass.)

George -

BARBARA *(taking a swig from the drink)* That's right. This is your father's house. Your father's house. My Father's House – that would be a fantastic name for your range. Or maybe we just call it The 20 Madeley Road Collection. Or! Or! Sally Seats. Too cute? But I wonder if we need to get her name in the name?

GEORGIE Sally?

BARBARA Mugabe.

GEORGIE What?

FRANKIE Nothing.

BARBARA Something.

Frankie's told me about your father and Sally and the affair and how she's forgiven them and turned your mother's bitter memories into beautiful objects of recycled remembrance.

These cushions are the link that binds your family to the woman Robert Mugabe discarded, like a scrap of fabric, too small, obsolete. You, a white family have picked her up and made her your own. You have atoned for the sins of the fathers, oh God, by embracing the sin of your father!

God this is good! You just don't know what you'll find in out here in Zone 4.

Where is the man himself?

FRANKIE What man?

BARBARA Your father.
I can't wait to hear his side of this. I want him to tell me about the woman he loved. The woman, the temptation he could not resist. She was his muse, I suppose. I know what musicians are like. I'm a creative type myself.

(THANDI enters with a gin and tonic for GEORGIE.)

GEORGIE This is ridiculous – you can't do this. I won't allow it!

FRANKIE You won't allow it?

GEORGIE *(to THANDI)* Do you believe this?

Sally Mugabe was not an innocent. She stood by while her husband killed innocents and never did she once raise a word of disapproval.

FRANKIE How do you know? How do you know what she said?

GEORGIE Well whatever it was it didn't work.

FRANKIE And what you're doing is? You're out there in public telling the world what a shit hole Zimbabwe is. Now everyone knows George. Has it made any difference?

Anyway he hadn't killed anyone when she was living here with dad.

THANDI They didn't actually live together.

BARBARA Clandestine. That's even better.

GEORGIE This is why you came back? To use her? After everything that's happened. Why?

Why would you want to associate yourself with her?

FRANKIE I didn't want to. Believe me.

BARBARA Ladies, what I believe is this multi layered story of a man, a father, who I think is a bridge between your world in modern day Zimbabwe, with all its problems and your world here in Ealing, with all its memories.

GEORGIE I live in Chiswick!

BARBARA Okay. But you see where I'm going with this. She is fighting the memory, you're fighting the man, all while your father was loving his wife. It's gold, marketing gold. So rich and real, and the Ealing connection – bringing Zimbabwe right here to W5. I mean the more I think about it the more I love the name. "The 20 Madeley Road Collection." I mean the brand logo could be a picture of this house – photo shopped to look like kente cloth. Right?

I certainly never thought I'd say this today ladies.
But Frankie.
I am so glad you are white.

THANDI Oh God!

He didn't have an affair with Sally Mugabe!
He didn't have an affair with Sally Mugabe!
He did not have an affair with Sally Mugabe!

He had an affair with Ava de Waal. Lily white Ava de Waal.

Before he ever left Harare he was carrying on with her.

FRANKIE How do you know?

THANDI I saw him and so did your mother!

(to Frankie) She caught him and she threw him out.

My mother made it all up, all of it. I guess to protect Ava.
My mother didn't know Sally would be - First Lady.

Happy now?

(to GEORGIE) Your father wasn't sleeping with the enemy!

BARBARA That's a shame.

THANDI *(to FRANKIE)* You're not your mother's daughter.

BARBARA *(to THANDI)* Are you sure you don't make *anything*?

*(A very simply version of **Nkosi Sikelel 'iAfrica** plays.*

ELLE and SALLY enter and all six women select a cushion and begin to move down stage. They will sit in a circle, on the cushions.

The women laugh and appear playful, like children.

THANDI takes a flower from the vase.

GEORGIE walks carefully, looking at something on the ground.

ELLE rides piggyback on BARBARA.

SALLY skips.

FRANKIE jumps about as if she is playing hopscotch. She then sits down on her cushion and the others follow, forming a circle. GEORGIE is last to sit.)

FRANKIE Come on Georgie! Hurry up!

GEORGIE Step on a crack, you break your mother's back.

SALLY *(to FRANKIE)* Patience is a virtue –

FRANKIE And virtue is a Grace
And Grace is a pretty little girl!

SALLY Who doesn't wash her face!

(SALLY moves her cushion away from FRANKIE.)

THANDI *(pulling petals from the flower)* He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not.

ELLE *(taking the flower from Thandi, with her thumb she pops the head of the flower off the stem and sings.)* Momma had a baby and its head popped off!

(laughter)

FRANKIE I one my mother.
I two my mother.
I three my mother
I four my mother.
I five my mother.
(FRANKIE and THANDI "high five.")
I six my mother.
I seven my mother.
I ate my mother!

(She makes chomping sounds.

There is more laughter.)

GEORGIE *(happily)* Birds of feather flock together –

THANDI And so do pigs and swine.

BARBARA Rats and mice will have their choice,
And so will I have mine!

(laughter)

FRANKIE I have a secret!

SALLY Don't tell!

(The women play "telephone." FRANKIE whispers the secret to the woman sitting next to her, and each in turn whispers it to the next woman. There is much laughter, until the secret goes all the way around the circle and gets back to FRANKIE.)

FRANKIE That's not the secret!

ELLE Isn't that funny?
It's really funny.

You thought you had a secret.

SALLY I told you! *(sadly to FRANKIE)* See you later alligator.

FRANKIE After a while crocodile.

(The women exit, taking with them all the cushions, including those left on the sofa, and the sewing machine. Only FRANKIE remains.)

(Lights up on the sitting room. GEORGIE sits on the sofa with a magazine. THANDI enters from upstairs.)

Scene 6, TUESDAY LATE AFTERNOON

GEORGIE How is he?

THANDI Healthy as a horse. But he should still see his own GP.

GEORGIE I knew there was nothing wrong. But I think he wanted to see you.

Frankie wouldn't say goodbye to him.

(FRANKIE exits the stage.)

THANDI Me neither. She's livid.

GEORGIE She took all the cushions, all of them. And she demanded that he give her the buttons. From your mother? She wasn't leaving until he handed the over buttons.

THANDI They were from a dress that belonged to Ava.

GEORGIE That's what he said.

Why would Frankie want them so badly? Why?

THANDI She.
Nick.

All I can tell you is they've got issues.

GEORGIE I'm not surprised. It's just them. I don't know how they do it.

Without Elle, I often wonder if Peter and I would keep this up.

THANDI You wouldn't stay married?

GEORGIE We wouldn't stay monogamous.

THANDI Did you tell Elle about the Sally thing?

GEORGIE Not yet – but she knows something's not right. Barbara rang. Last night.

THANDI And you took the call?

GEORGIE Dad did.

She wanted the cushions anyway. She said they were clever. Unusual. She thought "her people" could make them work.

THANDI And Frankie?

GEORGIE Said no. She wouldn't speak to her.

Barbara was of course disappointed. But. She said she wants to come by The Vigil next Saturday. She thinks someone might make something, jewellery or dolls, something she'll want.

She said if I introduced her to someone, the right someone – Urban Bazaar would make a contribution to The Vigil.

Thandi, I'm the assistant treasurer, I have to -

THANDI *(sympathetically)* I know.

GEORGIE Elle saw Frankie off to the airport. Clare drove. They took the sewing machine.

And Frankie.

THANDI Clare's a rubbish driver.

GEORGIE You heard. The last time they killed a parrot.

THANDI Nearly.

GEORGIE *(remembering)* Right.

THANDI *(stands up to leave)* Okay. Call me if he needs anything.

GEORGIE Thanks. Really thank you.
Listen. I'm sorry.
I heard you didn't get the job.

THANDI Did you?

GEORGIE Peter told me. He's such a tattler.

THANDI Did he tell you why?

GEORGIE No. Well he may have but I'd tuned him out.

THANDI They said I'm the heart and soul of the Acton office and they need me.

GEORGIE I'm not surprised.

THANDI I won't be promoted because they need me. They can't do without me
apparently. My organizational skills, my people skills, my paperwork skills. They
never mentioned my doctoring skills. But I'll get a pay increase.

GEORGIE That's good. Better really.

THANDI Really?
Did Peter tell you that they said I'm the mother of the office?

GEORGIE The what?

THANDI The mother figure.

I think they said I'm the 'matriarch.' Yes, matriarch is what they said.

GEORGIE What did you say?

THANDI *(despairing, almost to herself)* Twenty two years here and I'm just mother
fucking Africa.

GEORGIE Oh you didn't? I know you wanted the job, but you didn't?

Mothering is a huge responsibility. I'm sure they meant something. Good.

I'm sorry.

THANDI Don't be.

GEORGIE I often think if Frankie had a child she'd be happier. Warmer.

THANDI She would have if she could have.

GEORGIE Oh she can. She did. Nearly.

THANDI When?

GEORGIE She never told you? Well. Oh God. I better not. She – No I can't.

THANDI She's already cross – with all of us.

GEORGIE I know. It's nice.
I mean, it's not just me.

Frankie got pregnant when she was 17.

THANDI A baby?

GEORGIE An abortion.

I was at university in Cape Town. Mother rang and insisted I meet them in Pretoria.

She it all sorted out.
Frankie went off to a lovely little clinic.
When it was done we went shopping and had our nails painted.

THANDI Why not at the hospital in Harare? Your mum worked there.

GEORGIE She didn't want anyone to know.

THANDI For Frankie's sake.

GEORGIE Oh no, for her sake. My mother – Dr Kate Starling, she worked nonstop after dad left. Don't you remember? She mothered all day long in the hospital. There wasn't a lot left for us.

Me and Frankie, we were raised by Rhodesia. Blue sky and sun, and the shade of Bilboa tree. Along with house girls, gardeners, neighbours and teachers.

Dad was far away. So was mum.

I couldn't stay, like Frankie. I could never stay in Zimbabwe. I knew when I had children I wanted to raise them. Myself. I didn't want anyone or anything doing it for me.

Of course mother was furious when I left. She said I was betraying Zimbabwe, but what she meant was I was betraying her. After I left, she never spoke to me again. Never.

(ELLE enters, rushing)

I envy you. And your mother.

ELLE Mum. Thandi.

GEORGIE Slow down. Are you okay?

ELLE Yes. I'm fine.

GEORGIE Has Clare's driving improved?

ELLE Yes. It's fine.

GEORGIE Did you get her to Terminal 5? Her flight left out of Terminal 5.

ELLE Yeah. Five.

GEORGIE Was she okay?

ELLE Okay enough. She's on her way home. Okay?

GEORGIE Okay. Sit.

ELLE We need to talk mum. We really need to talk.

GEORGIE I know.

(ELLE turns to THANDI with a look that asks "you told her?" THANDI's expression reassures ELLE that GEORGIE does not "know.")

TIP enters from upstairs and SALLY enters from the kitchen.)

I want to talk to you about the Sally thing and Aunt Frankie and/

ELLE Granddad.
(ELLE kisses him on the cheek)
I'm going to tell mum.

It's time.

TIP Good girl.
Tell. Of course.
I'm here.

GEORGIE Tell me what?
(ELLE returns to sofa next to GEORGIE and THANDI.)

ELLE Mum -

(pause)

Granddad?
I'm okay.
Could you leave us?

TIP Me?

ELLE So we can talk.
Us girls.

(SALLY sits on the arm of the sofa, as TIP exits.

*Jimi Hendrix's **Night Bird Flying** plays in the background as the women huddle, talking.*

Black out.)

End.

Words to songs featured in *She is Rhodesia*

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica – as sung by Lady Smith Black Mambazo

(Zulu version)

Nkosi, sikelel' iAfrika,
Malupnakanyisw' udumo lwayo;
Yizwa imithandazo yethu
Nkosi sikelela,
Nkosi sikelela,

Nkosi, sikelel' iAfrika,
Malupnakanyisw' udumo lwayo;
Yizwa imithandazo yethu
Nkosi sikelela,
Nkosi sikelela,

Woza Moya (woza, woza),
Woza Moya (woza, woza),
Woza Moya, Oyingcwele.
Usisikelele, Thina lusapho lwayo.

Night Bird Flying – as sung by Jimi Hendrix

She's just a nigh bird flyin' through the night
Fly on
She's just a night bird making a midnight, midnight flight
Sail on, sail on
Well, she's flyin' down to me
But, 'til tomorrow got to set her free
Set her free

So all we got, baby, is one precious night
All we got is one precious night
Throw your blues and shoes and things
And lay it down under the bed
Just wrap me up in your beautiful wings,
Better hear what I say, yeah
Oh, carry me home
Please take me through your dreams
Inside your world I want to be

Until tomorrow no tears will be shed
Hold on 'til the sun gets out of bed
Hold on, hold on, baby
Fly on

Analysis of *She is Rhodesia*

Introduction: The Personal and The Place

Zimbabwean poet Vernon Cawford makes the point in *Not pots but boots*, that a poem and therefore a play, should seek a state of motion:

A poem is not a pot:
display of glazed perfection,
receptacle for slop;
but (please) more like a boot:
a way of going somewhere,
getting a good grip, giving the odd kick
why aren't there more poems like boots?

(Dawson, p. 29)

"Going somewhere" and providing an "odd kick" are worthy goals for any play and *She is Rhodesia* aspires to both. The play does not seek to make a point or cleverly arrive at a predetermined destination or embrace a static position but rather weaves its way among moving targets, competing and complimentary ideas that arrange themselves in realistic dramatic form.

I lived in Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia, from 1997 to 2001, and upon my departure longed to write a play about its people. Over time I imagined a multitude of story lines about Zimbabweans, but in development these imaginings always met frustrating dead ends. As each narrative grew, I became increasingly convinced that the story I was conjuring was not mine to tell. That which I was imagining belonged to Zimbabweans. Of course I realized if I deserted these ideas, the subsequent potential plays might never get written, but if they did, I knew they must be the work of someone else.

Be clear, it was not theatrical philanthropy on my part that led me to abandon stories to others. It was rather self preservation. Story telling that does not race from the imagination with authority and freedom will only smother the teller, burdening her with the doubt that comes of acting the pretender. It is not lost on me that *She is Rhodesia* is a play that among other things considers a woman suffering the self doubt that comes from of feeling like a pretender.

The following analysis of *She is Rhodesia*, as well as the play itself cannot help but be highly personal as Harare, urban Africa, is the site of my first forays into play making. Students of theatre are oft reminded

to write what they know, and undoubtedly my experience of Harare, my arrival, my departure and subsequent longing for the place and its people, enriches all my writing not only *She is Rhodesia* .

Elizabeth Wilson in her essay *Looking Backward: Nostalgia and the City* expresses it best when she says,

I shall...not apologise for beginning on an autobiographical note, and although I shall not explore the reasons why this subjective vein is so especially strong in urban writing, it must have something to do with the importance of place in any individual's sense of identity. It seems also to build on the feminist recognition of the importance of subjective experience and the insistence by feminists on the validity of the personal.

(Westwood and Williams, p. 127)

The richness *my* urban African experience could not be mined theatrically until it was met with my most personal of experience. Although while living in Harare I was entertained in the homes of black and white Zimbabweans, in the city, townships and out on farms; worked in schools with young people and at an arts festival with actors, directors and writers; suffered petrol shortages, currency collapse and sky high inflation; saw blacks and whites at ease with each other and heard political rhetoric that claimed otherwise; met President Robert Mugabe in a small setting, had tea with his second wife Grace on several occasions and lunched with opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, I *still* could not muster the authority I knew I would need if I were to tell a Zimbabwean story. It was not until I moved to Ealing, in west London that the authority necessary to write *She is Rhodesia* arrived on my doorstep.

Upon moving to West 5 in 2008, I quite accidentally found out that Sally Mugabe, Robert's first wife, lived in the very same postcode, in exile, at 20 Madeley Road from 1967 to 1973. (*Independent on Sunday*, 6 April 2008) My home in Ealing was only a block from the very house young Mrs Mugabe inhabited and while I never met her, I now had a picture of the woman. I knew the streets she walked and understood the longing for Zimbabwe she must have felt, as well as the contradictory feelings for relief that came from escaping Zimbabwe. She was a woman, *like me*, who never raised children and faced marital betrayal. *She* gave me the authority I required to helm the journey of *She is Rhodesia*.

Threads in the Fabric

Writing *She is Rhodesia* was like weaving a piece of fabric, the ends unfinished; bright threads crossed over others and disappeared, only to expose contrasting threads, creating a mesh of material, intended to be strong and textured. I did not set out to resolve anything with the play only to weave a story that displayed one bright thread against another.

The threads of interest include:

Mother Africa and all Her Sisters: Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe, required the press and eventually everyone to refer to his late first wife Sally as *Amai*, a word that means *mother* in Shona, the language of most Zimbabweans. While Sally had a child in 1967, a son, he died very young and she was never able to conceive again. Further, Robert Mugabe had effectively taken a second wife, Grace, who bore him several children prior to Sally's death in 1996. These facts inform *She is Rhodesia* and aspects of these facts are represented in each of the characters in the play.

Interestingly, Catherine Clinton a Professor of Black History at Harvard in her essay *Contents Under Pressure, White Women/Black History* provocatively opens with "As I white woman in black history I am frequently required to dispel myths..." (Golden and Shreve, p.238) Clinton goes on to explain her occasional despair, saying "Because like a black man trying to hail a cab in Manhattan it's everyday stereotyping that tatters the soul." (Golden and Shreve, p.239) While it is easy to find endless fault with a man the likes of Robert Mugabe, it is the manner in which he stereotyped his own wife that interested me; both the tragedy and comedy of the smothering asexual title of "Mother of Zimbabwe" was what I found significant. *She is Rhodesia* seeks to move from the stereotyping perpetrated on a public street corner, inside a cab, to the stereotyping perpetrated by a family of women, inside the confines of a home whose walls, via its former occupant Sally Mugabe, indeed talk.

Further, the play examines what happens to a woman's appeal when forced to wear the mother mantel. Old wives tales, pop culture and even science tell us men's interest in their partners, once they become mothers, can and does fade. But of more interest to me, is the woman, childless, but nonetheless cast as mother. Sally Mugabe's status as childless "Mother of Zimbabwe" prefigures Frankie's husband using "mothering" as an excuse for his betrayal of his childless wife and childless Thandi being wedged into the role of surrogate mother to Elle in the young woman's time of trouble.

Additionally but related, is the ease with which Africa accepts a man's desire to have more than wife. Sekai Nzenza-Shand describes her brothers funeral, where female villagers known as *varoora* sang and danced, providing comic relief at the burial of the man, a victim of HIV/AIDS. The *varoora* play out skits about his life, including vignettes about his girlfriends. One of the *varoora* playing the dead man says "[My wife] knows I am an African man and man like me with lots of money should have several wives.

That is my right.” (Nzenza-Shand, p. 20) The dead man’s mother, his wife and his girlfriends find this humorous. Nzenza-Shand claims “[t]here is no jealousy or ill-feeling between” the wife and the other women. (Nzenza-Shand, p. 21)

While most of the Western world finds polygamy unacceptable, the UK divorce rate in 2008 saw more 11.5% of every 1000 marriages end in divorce. (Telegraph.co.uk, 28 Jan 2010). If these failed marriages met their end due to affairs they could be classed as “two wife relationships.” And even when it is not an affair that preceded the marriage’s failure, those men who go on to remarry, while not at once, find themselves with two wives.

Whether Africa or the West, I was interested in examining various two-wife relationships.

The Legacy of Accidental Desegregation: I found Zimbabwe, and any number of Southern African nations, interesting although unwitting experiments in desegregation. Blacks and whites live on top of each other in urban Zimbabwe, Harare in particular, due to the fact that blacks work as domestics in nearly all white households.

John Pape in his article *Still Serving the Tea: Domestic Workers in Zimbabwe 1980-90*, cites a Zimbabwean government study, the Riddell Commission report, which noted that aside from low wages the biggest problem facing domestic workers was separation from their families. Domestics generally live in *kias* at the back of their employers’ properties, while their families live outside the suburbs, in rural areas or along the urban outer rim. (Pape, p. 388)

This situation is untenable and obviously contributes to maintaining the country’s economic power imbalance. However, it also has the unintended consequence of ensuring that blacks and whites know well the others’ personal routines, idiosyncrasies and familial rituals. Further, without daily contact with their own families’ many black domestics develop a quasi-parental role for themselves within the homes of their employers.

In his memoir *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*, Peter Godwin, a white Zimbabwean from a well-known family, describes the domestic workers in the Harare home of his parents:

Mavis has been our housekeeper for twenty years. She was divorced by her husband and cast out by her family when her first baby was born dead and she has had to have a hysterectomy. She and Isaac [the gardener] live in separate wings of the small brick staff quarters at the top of the garden.

(Godwin, p. 18)

In this case the Zimbabwean housekeeper's own family has abandoned her, making the Godwin's her only family. The mutual respect and concern is clear as Isaac, the gardener, says of Godwin's terminally ill father, (the reason for the author's return to Harare from New York), "I have been praying for him...The Lord will look after him because your father, he is a very good man." (Godwin, p.18) Defacto or otherwise, Zimbabwean suburban homes are the site of multi-racial families exhibiting all the comfort and controversy that typify any seemingly more traditional family.

Along with black nannies, housekeepers, gardeners and drivers, whites are looked after by benevolent police officers, handy mechanics, solicitous waiters, and all manner of black professionals and trades people who adopt a kind of parental attitude toward *their* whites; a role reversal that may not be wholly positive. As Crow and Banfield point out "a paradox then of the native experience...is that it was often not the poorest and most exploited but the more educated and relatively more privileged, those *having closer contact* with the colonizer who experience the sometimes contradictory effects of colonial life." (emphasis added) As to domestics, in a country burdened with rampant unemployment, working in a white home is, relatively speaking, a position of "privilege."

In *New Writing from Southern Africa* Anthony Chennell's analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's book *Nervous Conditions*, a coming of age story about a young black woman in Rhodesia, offers insights into the precarious position of the caring colonized:

The epigraph of *Nervous Conditions* identifies the title's provenance in [Jean-Paul] Sarte's preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* [which reads in part] '[t]he status of native is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*.'

(Ngara, p. 60)

Is such consent given as a quiet flex of a muscle by the colonized; a whisper that shouts, "You did not take from me, I willingly gave to you." Sarte would say yes, indeed according to Chennell, "at some point in the colonizing process, the colonized are attracted to or at least seek empowerment within the new order which a transforming colonialism has made available..." (Ngara, p. 60)

In her revealing memoir *Songs to an African Sunset*, Sekai Nzenza-Shand speaks honestly about her black Zimbabwean father's work with white missionaries. Her father climbed the ranks of Western religion inside Zimbabwe, providing his family and his village, with Western benefits, that is until he was "caught" worshipping ancestral spirits and keeping more than one wife. Despite her father's perceived offences, young Sekai was nonetheless afforded a place at the prestigious, well-funded missionary school. She becomes a case in point for Sartre when she quite simply says, "I was beginning to enjoy the benefits of being a good Christian, just as my father had done years before." (Nzenza-Shand, p. 40) Mere consent transforms to actual delight in the privilege, as it were, provided by the oppressor.

Colonialism transforms to post colonialism and post independence but does oppression give way to mutual solace and even transform to singular forbearance? Godwin explains the uncomfortable feeling of finding himself the *pathetic African* when on a flight to Zimbabwe a fellow African, a black Congolese businessman saw Godwin reading an article about Martin Olds, the second white farmer to be murdered by Mugabe's war vets, in 2000.

[The businessman] sees the [the article and the] picture and raises his eyes to look at me with an expression I cannot quite recognize at first. Then I realize it is pity. He feels sorry for Olds and for me and our little tribe of white Africans. I feel embarrassed, humiliated, mortified. I am not used to being the pitied one. I am the one who pities others.

(Godwin, p. 59)

In Zimbabwe in particular, it seems conceivable that Mugabe's recent and on-going reign of terror has encouraged the former colonized and the former colonizer to define themselves similarly; the beleaguered Zimbabwean. The warrior president's unending tenure begs the question, has his racist rhetoric and violent attacks on his people, required them, black and white, to seek solace in each other?

The Currency of Chaos and Culture: The currency of chaos and the related currency of all-things ethnic find voice in *She is Rhodesia*.

In the past several years one cannot help but notice the plethora of books and memoirs written by people living in, leaving or studying Zimbabwe. For example Peter Godwin whose first book, a memoir entitled *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa*, easily makes any contemporary list of required reading on Zimbabwe, felt the need to publish not only a second memoir in 2006 (the afore mentioned *When a*

Crocodile Eats the Sun) but a third to be released in October 2010 called *The Fear: The Last Days of Robert Mugabe*. Books recounting Mugabe's mismanagement and campaign of terror; stories of how animals were saved after farm invasions; black stories; white stories; Ian Smith's story; analysis of land reform and predictions for the former Rhodesia's future join titles from the likes of Doris Lessing and Yvonne Vera, two women who have been writing about Zimbabwe for decade on decade.

Clearly with chaos comes currency, and whether the authors are self-serving or simply benefiting from being at the right time at the right place, Zimbabweans, on paper, have enjoyed a place in the sun. *She is Rhodesia* seeks to continue to shine a light on the country's people, via the stage.

Further there is no dearth of companies selling the third world to a hungry first world. Our lurid interest in chaos combined with our increasing desire for authentic handcrafted items, alongside the ease with which items can now be marketed via technology, has created a cottage industry of selling cottage industries.

Andrew Potter, in his forth coming book *The Authenticity Hoax* argues that our need for ever increasing and new found types of status have the Western world on a wild goose chase for all that is authentic. From eggs laid by heritage chickens, eco holidays in the rain forest, or micro-farmed Zimbabwean coffee, our desire for meaningful lives has got us paying through the nose for the "real thing." According to Potter:

In various guises, the authentic is seen as an answer to the individual need for spiritual meaning and self-fulfilment, for an engaged and egalitarian politics, for living arrangements based on community and trust, and for a progressive economy that is local, sustainable and environmentally friendly. Yet it has also become, ironically, the principal for of status competition in contemporary life – what economists call a 'positional good,' one that get its value from serving as a measure of social rank or one-upmanship.

(Mcleans.ca, 14 April 2010)

Potter's notions about authenticity are not dissimilar to what I would refer to as the "Benetton Effect." The Italian fashion retailer has marked itself out with its provocative print ads. A black woman nursing a white child, a black horse having sex with a white horse, more simply a white man kissing a black woman, these ads often feature people (or even objects) of colour pictured to appear strong and empowered. Benetton must firstly be congratulated for leading the way in the notoriously white fashion industry by featuring people of colour early and consistently.

However in a “Benetton world” people of colour are not only empowered but indeed all the rage, everywhere, integrated, accepted, honoured. One would hope empowerment would come from enlightened attitudes and understanding, but I fear Potter’s theories on authenticity may in part explain the early 21st century pop-culture love affair with people of colour. Surely this was not what Dr King had in mind when he dreamed that one day his children would be judged by the content of their character rather than by the colour of their skin. Our mad search for authenticity would see them judged worthy, but *only* because of the colour of their skin.

While the “Benetton world” is beautiful, it is world of equality that does not yet exist in reality.

Dramatic Structure Pulled Apart

Genre: According to David Edgar “...genre is not the possession of the writer but of the audience” (Edgar, p.65) and encompasses a set of audience expectations. This definition makes genre a useful tool, tactic and reminder for the playwright. *She is Rhodesia* is not an experiment in theatre. It does not seek to break entirely new ground as to form. The play is an invitation to a journey that is peppered with dramatic clues as to what lies ahead. The play seeks to empower the audience and enable them to be on the lookout for turns in the dramatic journey. Call it kitchen sink drama, but I prefer to think of it as an easily-read dramatic map.

For example, the play opens with Sally Mugabe hinting at her husband’s betrayal and her status as first wife therefore highlighting the fact that *She is Rhodesia* is story about women who variously suffer betrayal and find themselves one of two wives. Importantly Sally explains that she has been buried, indicating she is not of this world but indeed a memory travelling alongside, even inside, Frankie. Further the play’s early scenes feature three generations from one family, an obvious sign post that his family’s past will be ground covered on the impending journey.

She is Rhodesia is a homecoming story; it opens with a family waiting in London for a daughter to arrive from Zimbabwe. This scene’s format, according to Edgar is a social process, a ceremony of sorts which the audience will easily recognize, bringing with them personal expectations and knowledge of just such an event in their own life; just as they should (Edgar, p.130). Laden with meaning, the homecoming sets

up the accurate expectation that someone burdened with baggage, both explosive and emotional, is arriving.

In Mikhail Bulgakov's *The White Guard*, Larion's arrival to the Turbin home serves to mark the other men out. The Turbin brothers and their friends – men with a love of music and literature – are still soldiers and appear even more “soldierly” against the arrival of naive poet Larion. Similarly Frankie's arrival brings Sally Mugabe back to 20 Madeley Road, and unwittingly serves to call into questions the other women's status as mothers, wives and Zimbabweans.

Undoubtedly *She is Rhodesia* could be classed kitchen sink realism, if we define the term as a kind of drama that seeks to expose the sordid quality of family life by slicing into it to reveal its layers. In the style of Donald Margulies' *Brooklyn Boy*, Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House*, Richard Greenberg's *Our Mother's Brief Affair* and countless 21st century Western plays, *She is Rhodesia* seeks to tell a family story that could happen, has happened, and is happening.

Story and Plot: The chronological events of *She is Rhodesia* are quite simple. A daughter, in an effort to escape her husband's recent affair, arrives from Zimbabwe to visit family and friends at her father's house at 20 Madeley Road in west London. Her pain is cushioned by her recent efforts to hand craft items from java print fabric. While in London she is also seeking to interest a Western company that sells third-world crafts in her creations. Her arrival forces memories of her father's affair with a woman many years ago. The identity of *this* woman, Robert Mugabe's first wife Sally, puts all the women in the play under pressure to consider the roles they are forced to shoulder.

The story of *She is Rhodesia* is necessarily straightforward and linear, because the plot, the manner in which the events are “ordered and *connected*,” (Edgar p. 19, emphasis added) is intricate and layered. An old lie, now cast as truth, not just simple betrayal is the fulcrum for the plot. The connections are made to this plot point when it appears as a truth in the story and when it appears as the lie that it is in the reality of the story.

A family's past, forgotten and untold, redefines the present. Fictions are held tight, bring comfort through familiarity. New truth pains more than old lies. Fairytales serve as emotional salve all within the confines of a linear plot and single location.

Space: Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* serves as a model play featuring a stage full of women in a single house. Taking its cue from this theatrical classic, the space for *She is Rhodesia* is a house in London but equally it is a Zimbabwean house. In Alexandra Fuller's memoir about her African childhood, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, she points out that the word Zimbabwe comes from the Shona words *dzima dza mabwe* meaning "houses of stone." (Fuller, p. 25), making the house at 20 Madeley Road a fitting space for the play. The space of the play is the house today, as well as the memory it holds from 40 years prior. The space of the play is a family, both a traditional family of a father and his biological daughters and the Zimbabwean family that includes a black woman living in London and her mother back in Harare.

Time/Rhythm: *She is Rhodesia* is a contemporary story that takes place over 5 days, Friday through Tuesday; when Frankie arrives in London from Harare and when she departs. However, with the inclusion of Sally Mugabe in particular, the play utilizes the events of her life, in London and Zimbabwe from 1968 to 1996, to consider the dilemmas of the other characters.

The rhythm, the distribution of action, is linear, steady, its motion provided by characters' desire to tell or not tell and the telling of fairytales. As such the centre of the play utilizes a quiet moment in the house, the site of all action, to unveil an Ndebele folktale, indeed the play within the play. Further, a dreamy moment just before the final scene, stops the action to cast the women in the role that the only man in the play would have for them, that of children – little girls. This serves as a kind of alternative play within the play.

The play's primary and I would argue most striking device, Sally Mugabe, a real person now dead, is distributed evenly throughout the play. She provides both humour and the dreamy quality one would expect of a play that delights in the telling of fairytales, urban myths and old wives tales.

Dialogue: If dialogue is defined as the quick transition between thought and speech (Waters' lecture, 24 Nov 2009) then tangents in the characters' conversations are not only understandable, but inevitable. Conversation in *She is Rhodesia* seeks to skip along like a stone over water, a single word serving as an ocean in which endless feelings and recollections float just below the surface of its utterance.

So for example young Elle and her Aunt Frankie are capable of holding two conversations at once: one about the merits of handmade cushions alongside another about an abortion (McDonald, pp.33-35) Like two woodwind instruments, these women's shared DNA enables them to speak a melody and a harmony, communicating on more than one level in more than one conversation.

Or as likely, one word, in this case "word" is responsible for leading the conversation away from Thandi's new job prospect and toward Tip's desire to wax nostalgic about Zimbabwe. (McDonald, p.20) Abrupt as this change appears, it serves to illustrate Tip's charming ability to smoothly dominate the conversation or when not dominating, ignore that which bores or bothers him.

American director Michael Kahn's perpetual advice to actors is to speak each line as if it was the *only* thing the character could possibly say. This sage advice governs the manner in which dialogue unfolds in *She is Rhodesia*. None of what is said should come as a complete surprise to the audience; once they tap into the play's rhythm and themes, they should be able to sense the sentiment of the dialogue if not the actual language.

She is Rhodesia does not seek to surprise the audience by jumping out from behind unseen dramatic walls, but instead surprise them with unique juxtapositions of familiar ideas and people. So for example as Frankie explains the pain of her husband's affair with a black woman, she redefines the word "Rhodesia," using it to mean obsolete and unwanted. Her sentiment is familiar while her language may well be a surprise.

Action

Edgar explains that a "dramatic action consists of a project...followed by a contradiction or reversal." (Edgar, p. 25). He usefully demonstrates the "hook in the twist" potency of dramatic action by considering "tag lines" from various films (Edgar, pp.24-25). Indeed if *She is Rhodesia* were to be given a tag line it would read, *Being African is not simply a matter of black and white*.

For the women in *She is Rhodesia* being African entails issues of exile, motherhood and marriage, all coloured of course by issues of race. Contradictions define the action; a women who is not a mother, is forced into mothering. A woman suffering the knowledge of her husband's affair turns to the memory of her father's affair for comfort.

Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* brilliantly exposes the angles within the triangle of adultery and the legacy of a lie. So too *She is Rhodesia* seeks to depict adultery triangles reassigned. For example Frankie, the wounded wife, substitutes her father and Sally Mugabe, for her husband and his lover. Frankie shrinks as she considers how she is indeed her mother's daughter so eventually expresses her pain, no matter how ugly, believing her mother did not. The proxy triangles continue as Thandi considers her mother and a family friend, the lover she wishes her mother had. The residue of a lie clings to both Frankie and Thandi, differently, but potently.

Kenneth Rowe, Arthur Miller's playwriting tutor, spoke of the "'past coming to life in the present and creating drama.'" (Edgar, p.30) As Edgar points out this tool of the trade is employed to best effect when a play starts "late." *She is Rhodesia* starts *after* a martial betrayal, nearly 40 years old, presumably forgotten, is brought to life by a more recent but seemingly similar affair that arrives in London from Zimbabwe with the return of a daughter. These affairs, the old one and the newer one, are lashed to a post that is the real life affair Sally Mugabe suffered at the hands of her husband Robert.

Memory, or more rightly the longing to forget not only fuels but it *is* the action of the play. As Spencer explains, action is what a character wants, not what she does (Spencer, p.38). What Frankie does is sew; what she wants to is blunt the pain of betrayal, and she does so by frenetically making cushions. That which Frankie wants serves as catalyst for what the other characters' want. The play is driven forward by memories of betrayal that overwhelm the characters, compelling them to reveal their connected secrets, lies and shame.

Character: Edgar explains that our attitude toward a character is developed via a matrix of impressions. (Edgar, p.47); what they say and how they say it, what they do and how they do it. In *She is Rhodesia* the developing matrix of impressions of each character builds via their respective reactions to telling, not telling and storytelling.

Storytelling in the play, in the form of urban legend, African folktales and old wives tales, serves as a kind of reprieve for the characters. Situated between telling and not telling, it is a way for the members of this family, these women, to express themselves without having to reveal or even confront the truth. An old family tale, neither secret nor true, arrives with Frankie from Zimbabwe and sits like baggage in

Tip's home. Elle's emerging predicament and inability to tell prefigures the old tale arriving with Frankie.

Early in the play Elle is desperate to keep something seemingly important and personal from her mother. While Thandi urges her to tell, Tip, her grandfather, seems nonplussed, keen to distance himself from the issue. Charming as this old musician surely is, his desire to remain outside the family fray, is not an attractive characteristic. Further Tip seems to enjoy telling stories, indulging old wives tales and urban legend, adding to his personal charm. Much later in the play we will see, the truth is of less interest to Tip.

In the opening scene Georgie wonders why Frankie is coming to London. Her sisterly suspicion begs the question, "what is Frankie not telling us?" And indeed Frankie spends the first half of the play "not telling." When she finally admits that her husband is having an affair and not just any affair, Thandi is put in the position again of demanding that the truth be told. She finds herself having to be the responsible adult, a mother hen of sorts; not a role she relishes. Not surprisingly Tip has no interest in telling his daughter the truth; in fact he believes the lie, the fairytale to be preferable.

Storytelling takes on a further character colour, when Barbara the marketing executive from Urban Bazaar arrives to meet Frankie. While Barbara wants the cushions Frankie makes she also wants Frankie to fit the consumer ideal of a cushion creator from Africa. Barbara knows she has an opportunity take advantage of Zimbabwe's chaos cache, but if Frankie is simply a white woman making cushions from African fabric, the marketing story cannot gain traction according to Barbara. Barbara's desperation for the right story goes a long way in defining her character while Frankie's desperate need to sell her cushions, to be validated, propels her to reveal her father's betrayal to a near stranger, adding to the matrix of impressions of both these characters.

Spencer encourages the playwright to continue to reveal a character up to and through the very last line of a play (Spencer, p.178). The various women in *She is Rhodesia* reveal themselves at varying speeds throughout the play, but with Spencer in mind, Georgie is possibly the most self revelatory in the very last lines of the play. Not so much a wrapping up, but an opening up; motherhood has taken a beating in the play and now the only actual mother on stage reveals how vital that role is to her.

Images as Symbols

Playwright Dan Rebellato persuasively advocates writing with images, not just when penning a radio play but any play (Lecture, 12 Jan 2010). Writing a screenplay, a script that at its best is nearly all images, reminds a writer just how powerful they can be; indeed worth a thousand words.

I am admittedly enamoured with language. I marvel at the way in which a handful of words can bring memories, long buried, to startling life. But no matter how much I revere language, I am certain that it is images that anchor a play in the minds of the audience. So rather than allowing the play to float in the dramatic air of the stage, I have sought to ground *She is Rhodesia* with visions, colourful and substantial, three dimensional and importantly domestic; kitchen sink dramas may be derided, but within the life of such plays, images are rife.

Fabric defines the themes of *She is Rhodesia* and is a recurring image in the narrative, along with other maternal images, bright and uplifting, protective, homely; these images support the maternal thread woven into the play.

These images include:

A piece of kente cloth

Rolled out early in the play, it surely represents Frankie's homecoming; rolling herself out to her awaiting family. For each member of the family, the bright fabric is something precious, a memory. Further and importantly kente cloth, while easy to find in Zimbabwe, is a product of Ghana, the birthplace of Sally Mugabe. The kente cloth in London represents Sally's exile in Ealing and the play bringing her back.

A sofa full of cushions

The cushions represent Frankie's escape from the pain of her marriage. If she can sell them to Urban Bazaar, she will have connected herself to something outside her husband and outside Zimbabwe. The cushions are her creations; her charges and repeatedly serve as stand-ins for children.

Frankie encourages Elle to "put on" the kente cloth, to wear it as many Zimbabweans would wear it, as a kind of infant rucksack. Elle is disturbed by the notion of carrying a child, no matter how imaginary and

Thandi is forced to take charge and wrap the fabric around herself. Frankie tosses her a cushion and says,

“Make this the baby.” (McDonald, p.18)

Later in the play, Barbara, the marketing executive, will squeeze a cushion in delight, holding it to her breast and remark,

“Funny aren’t they. Cushy. Like little babies. You just want to hug them.”(McDonald, p.50)

Birds

Birds are a key image in *She is Rhodesia*. A bird is features on the Zimbabwean flag and also made an appearance on the Rhodesian national flag.

Like the cushions, birds generally represent children in the play. When Elle, in a car, believes she has nearly killed a parrot, it is the image of a dead bird that disturbs her, forcing her to consider the child she has killed. Later in an Ndebele folktale a guinea fowl will be taken as child by a woman who has none.

Frankie creates a cushion embroidered with the image of a guinea fowl, and as stated previously, this bird cushion is seen as a kind of child for several women in the play.

Tip refers to the women in his life as children, “little girls.” The woman we never meet, but actually who carried on an affair with Tip, the woman Georgie claims, “couldn’t cope” is named Ava, a nod to her childish, bird like character, certainly in the eyes of her former lover.

Mother Africa and Child

Sally comforts and annoys Frankie, in a dream, while Thandi annoys and comforts Elle in reality. The white women are the children, while the black women, neither a mother herself, are cast in the maternalistic role.

A handful of buttons.

These are the gift Thandi’s mother sends, via Frankie, to Tip. They are seemingly meaningless and while a sweet gift from the black women, on their face they are worthless. However, these buttons are from a dress Tip’s lover wore long ago. He would have once unbuttoned the dress they came from. Thandi’s

mother has removed them from the garment, and presented them to Tip; like kente cloth they represent a memory, a very personal memory that in fact should only be Tip's but is remarkably a memory belonging to Thandi's mother as well. The buttons are the physical manifestation of the black house girl's (Thandi's mother) knowing; what she saw and heard, the manner in which she looked after the young lovers. The buttons may even be a kind of apology for her inability to ultimately protect them from the eventual detection that would send Tip off to London.

Conclusion

For a decade Zimbabwe has been in a holding pattern, waiting for Robert Mugabe to die, hoping that he does not completely decimate its resources, human and natural, before he goes. Stories of farm invasions, war veterans, currency collapse, diamond mines and leadership failure are part of the politics of waiting in Zimbabwe. However while a people waits for one man to die, their lives go on, personal stories that are only marginally touched by his terror, play out. With *She is Rhodesia* I have sought to tell an alternative Zimbabwean story that might well be missed while we are busy watching a mad man at work.

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